

**BRAVO COMPANY AND ANTI-TANK PLATOON  
1987**

**PICTORIAL HISTORY JOURNAL**

**61 MECHANISED BATTALION GROUP**



**DAWID LOTTER**





Written by Dawid Lotter, an already successful published writer who was also the commander of Bravo Company 1987. You get an excellent depiction of a year in the life of a mechanised infantry company and its anti-tank platoon during the South African Bush war. From the beginning you see the building of soldiers from all the ranks into a battle ready fighting unit. When you intersperse Dawid's writings, with anecdotes and photos of the the other role-players themselves, building up to the climax of their battles fought on the Lomba during Modular. You get given an unparalleled view from a company commander as well as from individual troops with a window into their thoughts, fears and actions. A more complete collection of photos of a battle company's year you will struggle to find and if you wore browns you will not be able to help yourself becoming immersed as you relive your own memories through these pictures and story.

Robert Torrani



**BRAVO 1987  
JOURNAL**



## OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY DAWID LOTTER

**Bravo Company - 61 Mechanized Battalion Group.  
E Pub 2013**

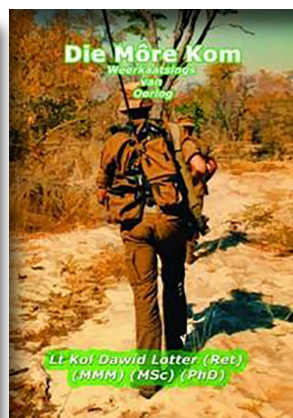
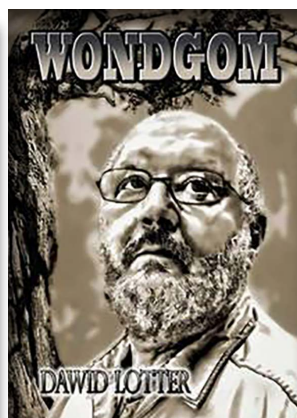
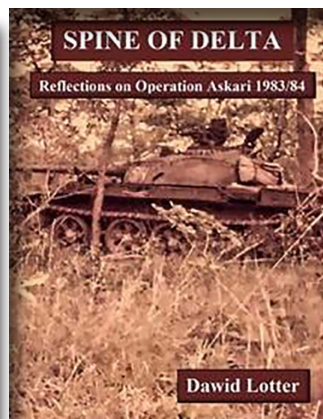
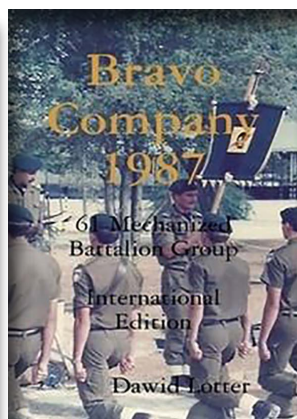
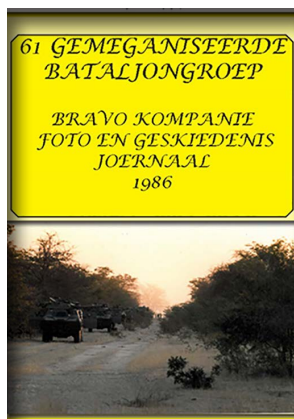
**Spine of Delta - Reflections on Operation Askari 1983/1984  
@ November 2014 # ISBN 978-0-620-63621-6**

**Kleurskakerings van Skarlaken - Gedigte en Woordsketse uit die Bosoorlog  
@ Desember 2014 # ISBN 978-0-620-63372-7**

**Nubes Belli - Oorlogswolke/ Clouds of War  
@ September 2015 # ISBN 978-0-620-66695-4**

**Wondgom - Gedigte en Woordsketse uit en oor die Bosoorlog  
@ April 2016 # ISBN 978-0-620-69390-5**

**Die Môre Kom – Weerkaatsings van Oorlog  
@ July 2017 # ISBN 978-0-620-76158-1**



**BRAVO COMPANY AND ANTI-TANK PLATOON  
JOURNAL  
1987**

**61 MECHANISED BATTALION GROUP**



**PUBLISHED APRIL 2021**





**Copyright © April 2021 Dawid Lotter**

**All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review or scholarly journal.**

**The E - PDF is offered free of charge and may be distributed on the condition that it cannot be sold. Should you value this Journal, kindly consider a donation to the 61 Mech Bn Group Veterans Association.**

**Banking Information**

**Account Name: 61 Mech Battalion Group Veterans Association**

**Bank Name: Standard Bank SA**

**Branch Code: 630 522 (Code for cash deposits)**

**006305 (Code for EFT's)**

**Account Number: 00 329 366 1**

**Reference: Bravo Book**

**Send proof of payment and personal information to  
admin@61mech.org.za**

**A limited series in printed format is available at a price that only covers the printing and handling cost.**



**ISBN 978-0-620-93155-7(e-book)**

**Dawid Lotter**

**Klerksdorp**

**April 2021**

## **DEDICATION**

**This Bravo Journal is dedicated to the members of Bravo Company and the Anti-Tank platoon who served with 61 Mechanised Battalion Group in 1987. This group reported for National Service in January 1986 and after a year of training at various base camps they were transferred for the year 1987 to 61 Mech. The 189 members served with enthusiasm and valour both in the Counter Insurgency role in Ovamboland and in the conventional role during Operation Modular.**

**It was my privilege and honour to be their commander.  
I shall never forget them.**

**VENI VIDI VICI**

**Dawid Lotter 15 April 2021**







# Contents

Contents	i
Acknowledgements	iv
Foreword	v
About the Author	vi
Preface	vii

## INTRODUCTION

A Legend of a Special Kind	1
Ode to 61 Mech Bn Gp	6
The Heritage of Bravo Company	7
Operational Picture - Immediate Run-Up To 1987	8
11 December 1986 - Arrival	9
Final Ceremonies	21

## BRAVO STRUCTURE

Command Structure	23
Restructuring the V Echelon	34
Restructuring the A1 Echelon	36
Our Facilities	37
Routines	41
Corporal Punishment	42

## FIRST EXPERIENCES

The Bravo Oath	44
Omuthiya Special	52
Omuthya Christmas 1986	55
Our Bravo Camp - Our Pride	64

## TRAINING

Retraining	70
Equipment Awareness	70
Stable Parade	71
Foot Inspection	87
Mechanised Training	89
2 to 13 February - Counter Insurgency Training	115
Conversion of Platoon 6 to Conventional 60mm Mortars	120
Trench Crossing	123
Recognition and Mechanism of Enemy Weapons	130

## 61 MECH UNIT EXERCISES

Exercise Andoni Flats	153
Exercise Veni Vidi Vici	163
Exercise Zenula	172



## **61 MECH FITNESS AND SPORT**

<b>Omuthiya Tug Of War Trials - 4 March</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>Dippenaars Marathon 26 March</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>Chief of the Army Fitness Evaluation</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>Team Building</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>Bundelsport</b>	<b>236</b>

## **SOCIAL ACTIVITIES**

<b>Barbeques</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>Staff Members Potjie</b>	<b>244</b>
<b>Leadergroup teambuild at TCL club</b>	<b>245</b>
<b>Hastati Munch</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>Officers Teambuilding Namatonie</b>	<b>260</b>
<b>Officers Teambuilding Gross Barmen</b>	<b>265</b>
<b>Visit to the Hoba meteorite (60 ton) 18 February</b>	<b>268</b>
<b>Visit to Lake Otshikoto</b>	<b>270</b>
<b>Minor Games Competition - 8 June</b>	<b>272</b>

## **PRE-MODULAR DEPLOYMENTS 273**

<b>Procedures for Deploying to Various Areas in Ovamboland</b>	<b>274</b>
<b>20 February to 3 March - Ombalantu and Ondangwa.</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>6 to 14 March - Ombalantu</b>	<b>282</b>
<b>14 to 16 March - Ruacana</b>	<b>327</b>
<b>4 to 13 July Ogongo</b>	<b>336</b>
<b>Ogongo Watertower</b>	<b>343</b>
<b>11 July - Landmine at Ogongo</b>	<b>348</b>
<b>11 July - Visit Unita</b>	<b>357</b>
<b>11 July - Braaivleis - Ogongo</b>	<b>376</b>
<b>30 July to 8 August -Ondangwa - Oshikango</b>	<b>395</b>
<b>11 to 18 August - Bittersoet I</b>	<b>423</b>
<b>19 to 27 August - Final Preparations - Omuthiya</b>	<b>449</b>
<b>27 to 1 September Bittersoet II</b>	<b>454</b>

## **OPERATION MODULAR**

<b>BRAVO - ENTERING THE WAR</b>	<b>455</b>
<b>Mobilisation</b>	<b>455</b>
<b>Force Levels</b>	<b>456</b>
<b>Advance from Rundu to Mavinga</b>	<b>457</b>
<b>Main Force to Luenge</b>	<b>460</b>
<b>Anti-Tank Platoon Route</b>	<b>466</b>
<b>Restructuring</b>	<b>468</b>
<b>Prelude to 13 September</b>	<b>474</b>

## **BRAVO - BATTLE PARTICIPATION CHRONOLOGICAL**

<b>Day Battle 13 September</b>	<b>478</b>
--------------------------------	------------

Night Battle 13 September	488
Reflections	501
Planning for 16 September	513
Attack on FAPLA 47 Bde - 16 September	514
Interlude - 17 September to 2 October	524
Defeating 47 Brigade - 3 October	527
Reconnaissance for the Attack	527
The Attack on 3 October	539
Follow Up the FAPLA Retreat	555
Combat Team Delta	563
Reconnaissance North of the source of the Mianei river	570
The Attack on 59 Bde - 17 Oct	573
The Wedge - 18 To 24 October	581
The Return Journey to Mavinga in 36 Hours	588
Arrival Back on the Mianei Front	590
The Pursuit - 9 November	592
Actions on the Hube River - 16 November	595
The Chase to Chambinga - 17 November	598
Last Obstacles	609
 DAILY LIFE IN A HIDING PLACE	 602
 Foxhole	 604
Swimming in the Mavinga River	608
Running the Bush Marathon	624
Iron-Man Competition	629
Digging for Water	635
Washing and Showering	637
Mail on the Front.	645
Waiting	463
 FINAL COUNT DOWN 30 NOVEMBER TO 11 DECEMBER 703	
 From Mavinga to Rundu	 704
The Legacy of the Bravo “Ouman Kierie”	704
Southward Bound	722
The Last Stretch	734
The Officers Ring	737
The 61 Mech Dagger	738
Epilogue	741



## Acknowledgements

This Journal is a collection of photographs that I recorded as the Bravo company commander during 1987. The research for the story line text was done for a unpublished E-PDF (2013). Some of the contributors had since passed away. I thank them in their absence - RIP. During December 2021 Robert Torrani launched a project to trace as many of the surviving members of Bravo/Anti-Tank of 1987. He prompted them for anecdotes on their memories about that special year. Robert didn't take "no" for an answer and gathered numerous fresh stories. Without his perseverance and encouragement, this Journal would have been a dull series of photos. **THANK YOU, ROB.**

To the members who offered their Diary's for use in the Journal, **THANK YOU.** You supplied me with the tools of bringing the timelines together in a coherent whole. Your first hand information brought aspects to the surface that started to fade after 34 years.

**Theuns Cloete  
Hugo Gerryts  
John McCrum**

To all the other Bravo members who shared their experiences -**THANK YOU.** You brought closure and clarity after 34 years.

### Proofreading

This publication was proofread by members who has English as a home language. We/They are not professional proof-readers and minor language construction errors may occur.

**THANKS**

**Robert Torrani and Andrew Doubell.**





## **Prologue**

**This poem was written by Rifleman Hugo Gerryts from platoon 6 during  
Operation Modular September to December 1987.**

**A more appropriate foreword is hard to find.**

### **BRAVO COMPANY**

**This is not fancy scribbling,  
It's not in my best writing.  
This is not a speech,  
On a sunny beach.**

**This is not even a love story,  
It's just a poem about Bravo Company.  
A big family,  
A father,  
With all his sons,  
With all the ups and downs  
That makes you ready for life.**

**What would all this have been without  
Victory.... Churchill and all the others?  
An empty and forgotten envelope,  
To reflect endless thoughts upon.**

**We are not always winners,  
But we know deep inside  
That when they call us,  
We shall survive  
Because we have the right father.  
© Hugo Gerryts**



## About the Author



Bravo 1987 was my (Dawid Lotter) sixth company since I transferred to the Mechanised Infantry in 1981. Off all the positions and ranks one might encounter in a Permanent Force career, that of a company commander, I experienced as a great privilege. I started my career in 1975 with the rank of private in the Administrative Service Corps (ADK/ ASC) and was stationed at the SADF Equestrian Centre. During 1976 I did my junior leader course at Services School and became a second lieutenant. I transferred to the Personnel Service Corps (PDK/ PSC) in 1977 and attended the Formative Course for young officers at Army Gymnasium. I was selected for academic training and attended the SA Military Academy at Saldanha during 1978 to 1980. I again transferred to Mechanised Infantry beginning of January 1981 and started my Mechanised Infantry career as a Captain in 1 SA Infantry Battalion.

After a four-month Mechanised conversion course at the unit, I got my first training company as the commander. In 1982 I became the commander of Retraining Base at Debrug. This base was established as a facility to accommodate soldiers that were out of sync with the training cycle due to inability to cope, long periods of absence without leave, extra days due to Detention Barracks sentences and soldiers with drug addiction. In 1983 I became commander of Alpha Company and after training had the privilege to lead them into combat ( Op Askari). During the first part of 1984 I served as an Operations Officer at the Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC) in Angola. I transferred to 4 SAI Bn where I commanded Charlie Company. We were detached to 61 Mech Bn Gp until the end of the year. During 1985 I was officially the Intelligence Officer at 4 SAI Bn, but mostly deployed as the Task Team Commander for the two 4 SAI Bn company's deployed on the Mozambique border. During 1986 and 1987 I was the permanent Infantry Commander for Bravo Company at Omuthiya. Except for a short 5 weeks in 1983 when I was the second in command for O Company in 1 SAI Bn, I never experienced being a Platoon Commander. I had to learn very quickly to survive as a company commander.



## Foreword

The appeal of this book to the individual involved is obvious. However, when paging through the book, unlike the many written books about the bush war with history and statistics. This book is a photo journal of a year in the lives of many National servicemen and Permanent forces members.

These men worked together, to become part of South Africa's "David" as they stepped out onto the battlefields during Operation Modular against their Goliath. The book visually brings to the eyes and mind of the reader, the changes that happen to young men. Sometimes no more than boys as they progress through the year towards manhood.

This is the story of Bravo Company 1987. However it could also be the story of many companies who moved through the unit that was 61 Mechanised Battalion in the years prior to or after Bravo 1987. Each company with their own David vs Goliath moments. It could also be the story of a 4 SAI company whose members trained together with the members of 61 Mech at their different corps in their first year of military service. It could even be the story of any MOT unit, just different vehicle and tools of the trade.

The book will take you from their arrival in December 1986, through all the facets of what became hours, days, weeks and months of training to do what was required in operation Modular in later part of 1987. It traverses through their downtime, the maintenance of camp and vehicle and also importantly the maintenance and growth of the individual. There are pictures of individuals but most of the pictures depict the individual in a group or team surrounded by his brothers.

Bravo company 1987 excelled in all the tasks they took on during the year, whether it was inspections, to training to the teambuilding exercises that eventually led to battles on a battlefield. This was only possible through contributions of the individuals who worked together as a team. Our motto was "Veni, Vidi, Vidi" which means, "I came, I saw, I conquered" but in hindsight it should have been "Vicimus, Vidimus, Venimus" which means "We Came, We Saw, We Conquered" because although we were individuals, we overcame the challenges as a group.

We salute our Brothers, for their contributions in our history. At the going down of the Sun, we shall remember them.

Robert Torrani - 2021





**March 2021. Some Bravo 1987 guys managed to get together for the weekend. Some seeing each other for the first time in 34 years.**





## INTRODUCTION

### *A Legend of a Special Kind*



In order to understand the context in which the photo journal takes place, it is necessary to understand the role and composition of 61 Meg. The unit was part of the South African Infantry Corps. Although classified as a mechanized infantry, it was a combined force consisting of infantry, armor, artillery and so on.

It started in 1978 when the 1 SAI Bn intake, after their training period, deployed in Ovamboland at Etalé base. Conscription was extended to 24 months that year. Exemption was granted for those who wanted to study. The unit strength dropped to 200 men. They were grouped as A company under the command of Maj E P van Lill. Shortly after being grouped a part of the company left for 1 SAI to collect first Ratel 20s.

An evaluation followed on the applicability of ratels in closed terrain at what would later become known as Omuthiya. The result was that Ratels could be used successfully. The first deployments of Fighting Group Juliet (The Pre-Phase of 61 Meg) and also their first trial, were with the crossing of the border to seek and liberate Spr van der Mescht. Van der Mescht was captured during the night of 18 February 1978 in a PLAN raid just outside Elundu.

During October 1978, it was decided to establish a permanent mechanized unit in the SWA operational area. The unit would be stationed at Omuthiya. The initial name of the unit was 60 Mechanized Battalion Group, but was soon changed to 61 Mechanized Battalion Group. The headquarters moved from Oshakati to Tsumeb.

During 1979, the unit participated in Ops Awake and Ops Carrot to destroy PLAN infiltrators in the farming areas south of Ovamboland. In November 1979, the new Omuyhiya Base was officially opened. During 1980, the base at Omuthiya were further developed, and the commando units around Tsumeb were trained. During June 1980, the unit participated in Ops Sceptic, with the aim of destroying PLAN's command and control structure in central south Angola.

During 1981, the unit was already established as one of the top first line combat units in the SA Army. Up to this point, sub units were provided from feeder units to 61 Mech for short periods. The system changed in 1981 to 12 months of deployment periods. The unit participated in Ops Protea during August 1981. Ops Daisy follows in November 1981. The unit also participated in Ops Makro, which was an external counter-insurgency Ops in southern Angola with the tactical headquarters being at Ondjiva.



*Ratel SS (Soft Steel)*  
*Photo Credit Tony Savides.*

During 1982, the units continued participation in Ops Makro was as a power show as well as control operation around Xangongo Mongua, Ongiva, Evale and Mupa. The unit then participated in Ops Meebos 1 from 1 to 7 March 1982 with the aim of rushing to the aid of a militia unit, which had gotten into trouble in Angola.

After Ops Makro, the Unit then participated in Ops Yahoo from the 14th April to 25th May 1982. Ops Meebos II then followed from 18TH July to 30th August 1982 where the unit was used as a mobile reserve. During Ops Meebos II from 18 July to 30 August 1982, the unit was used as the mobile reserve. The unit's objective was to provide protection to the attacking force against FAPLA conventional deployments. The purpose of the larger operation was to disrupt PLAN bases deep in Angola. This would prevent PLAN from being able to control their insurgents in Ovamboland.

In 1983, the unit participated in Ops Phoenix with the goal of cutting PLAN and providing farm protection. Thereafter the unit participated in Ops Dolphyn where the aim was to combat PLAN infiltration. During this period, the unit camped at the Nehoni mission station where they were dug in. Through mobile



and foot patrols, they provided support to the local population.

Op Askari took place over December 1983 and Jan 84. The unit was to bind the FAPLA forces at Cahama. This would prevent FAPLA from interfering with the attack on Cuvelai, which was being carried out by a citizen force combat group. However after a failed attack by combat group Delta and a refusal to continue the fighting, 61 Mech had to rush to Cuvelai.



**Operation Askari**



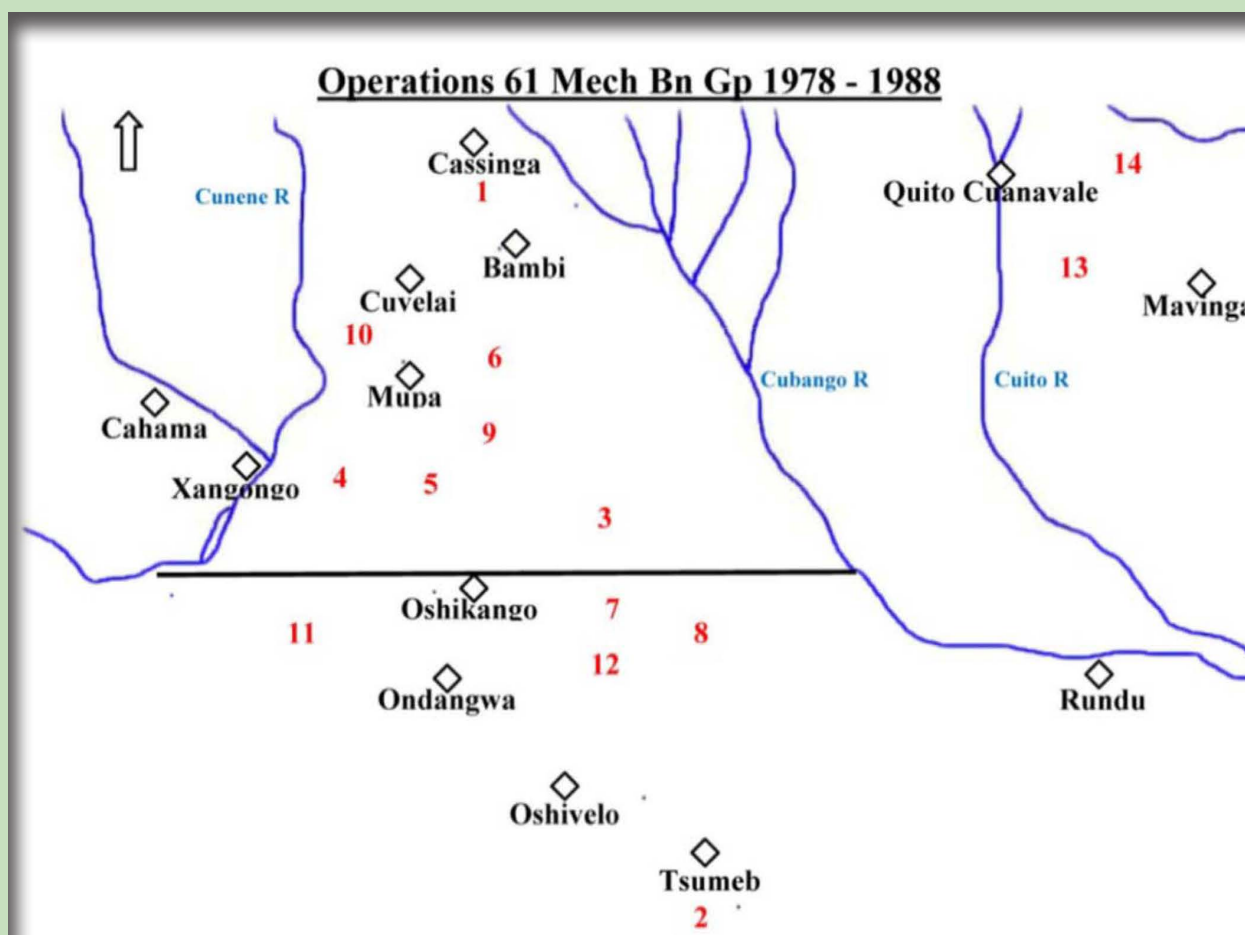




**During 1984, the objective of the unit was to turn the local attitudes to being positive towards the SADF. This was implemented through Ops Vasvat and Ops Nekomdraai and was continued into 1985 through Ops Pronkertjie and Ops Viper. During 1986 the unit again participated in area operations in Ovamboland. In 1987 the unit participated in Op Modular where in this Bravo Journal the story of Bravo 1987 unfolds.**







*1 - Ops Reideer (1978), 2 - Ops Awake en Ops Carrot (1979), 3 - Ops Sceptic (1980), 4 - Ops Protea (1981), 5 - Ops Makro (1982), 6 - Ops Meebos (1982), 7 - Ops Yahoo (1982), 8 - Ops Phoenix (1983), 9 - Ops Dolfyn (1983), 10 - Ops Askari (1983), 11 - Ops Vasvat and Ops Nekomdraai (1984), 12 - Ops Pronkertjie and Ops Viper (1985), 13 - Ops Modulêr (1987), 14 - Ops Hooper (1988).*



## Ode to 61 Mech Bn Gp

At the southern point of the Dark Continent;  
A nation in a global conflict ensnared  
Would bear witness and a new vision ferment  
As settlement of a cold war dispute was aired.

From a war that for decades would transpire  
A proud and noble unit emerged.  
With unrivalled courage and unrivalled fire  
The 61 Mech legacy stirred.

In only 28 years of existence  
Participating in many a landward fight;  
Internally a symbol of democratic persistence  
The very spine of a defence system's might.

A monument built to excellence  
A legend that will remain in eminence.

From the plains to the highest peak raised,  
'Till the last trumpet has sounded;  
61 will be remembered and praised  
Enfolded in fame unbounded.

Its reputation for daring was unique  
And its war ethic never ever disputed;  
Held in extraordinary respect and mystique  
By every friend and foe never diluted.

Made up of every corps  
61's legend will last ever more;  
Each a mechanised soldier in own right  
In a single unit combined to fight  
Each had a place in its pure warrior heart,  
Each of the unified body a part.

Legendary from its time,  
Legendary in its time,  
Legendary after its time,  
Legendary for all time,  
61 Mechanised Battalion Group!

© Dawid Lotter – 22 Augustus 2015  
As revised by Genl Tony Savides



## The Heritage of Bravo Company



Prior to 1981, all sub-units serving 61 Meg were detached on a short-term basis from the various training units. During 1981, the system was changed, and approval was granted for 12-month deployment periods. The Bravo company commanders and operations in which they participated are as follows:

**Ops Carrot April 1981 – Capt. Koos Liebenberg.**

**Ops Protea August 1981- Capt Koos Liebenberg.**

**Ops Daisy November 1981 - Capt Koos Liebenberg.**

**Ops Makro December 1981 tot January 1982 – Capt Thomas Dreyer.**

**Ops Meebos I: March 1981- Captein Thomas Dreyer.**

**Ops Yahoo April tot May 1982 - Capt Vissie Visser.**

**Ops Meebos II July tot August 1982 - Capt Vissie Visser.**

During 1983 several relief companies from the feeder units served at 61 Mech Bn Gp. The unit participated in Ops Phoenix and Dolfyn. Ops Askari was executed by the 1983 1SAI Bn intake under command of 61 Mech Bn Gp. After Ops Askari the companies returned to 4 SAI Bn. There was no permanent Bravo Coy during 1984. The four 4 SAI Bn infantry companies were detached to 61 Mech Bn Gp on a rotational basis. During 1985 there were again no permanent infantry companies at 61 Mech Bn Gp.

At the end of 1985 Maj Dawid Lotter was transferred to 61 Mech Bn Gp as permanent Bravo Coy commander.

At the end of 1986 Lotter was promoted to 2nd-in-command of 61 Mech Bn Gp but declined the appointment. He chose to remain a company commander for another year.





## Operational Picture - Immediate Run-Up To 1987



### Operation Second Congress 1985

In mid 1985 and for the remainder of the year the Angolan government executed an offensive called Operation Second Congress II. The plan called for the largest ever two frontal attack on UNITA forces in Angola. Led by Soviet and Cuban military advisors this plan called for a simultaneous attack on Cazombo in the east and Mavinga in the south-east and to take one or both objectives by 3 September. Although it failed, the initial success of Second congress before it was halted by logistical problems and the help of the SADF intervention had proven that UNITA was not invincible, that FAPLA could chase it out of an area.

In December 1985 the MPLA government believed that the only solution to the UNITA problem was another operation to occupy the Unita territory. This dictated South African involvement in the increasingly conventional environment of the 11-year-old Angolan civil war.

### Operation Southern Cross and Alpha Centauri 1986

Operation Southern Cross was not successful and therefore Operation Alpha Centauri called for a ground assault during August 1986 on the FAPLA town and airbase at Cuito Cuanavale. Originally the plan called for a night attack by 32 Battalion and UNITA troops supported by artillery but the South African government decided that the attack would be carried out by UNITA and 32 Battalion would protect the SADF support troops and artillery.

Operation Alpha Centauri proved that the G-5 and its base-bleed ammunition had performed excellently, and had turned out to be the main success factor. It was quite clear that UNITA was still not capable of launching or defending against conventional attacks. Thirdly, the days of unchallenged air superiority were finally gone.

These lessons learnt formed the foundation of SADF military thought when the FAPLA offensive started in August 1987.





## 11 December 1986 - Arrival



**Bravo Coy 1986 missed the battles of 1987 although they were prepared. The real test of Bravo Coy only came in 1987 with Ops Modular.**

**The 1986 Bravo Coy members were eagerly looking forward to the arrival of the new Bravo Coy for 1987. It meant it was close to their time to clear out, but there were also lots of planning among members about induction or initiation of the new members. Due to the fact that I got to know my troops over the past year I anticipated problems and therefore made a deal with them. They could fetch the new Bravo Coy at the tar road and bring them into the base. At the base they could look them over and read them the riot act. No one was however allowed to touch any new troop for the duration.**

**To be able to fetch the “bosrowers” at the turnoff from the tar road, it implied that the “Oumanne” had to walk the about 1500 meters, and then of course back with the new intake. The total initiation continued for about an hour. Thereafter it was done. Luckily, I had a couple of troops that had to remain behind due to “extra days”. I used them as examples of what would happen if any further initiation took place. If I heard of any initiation it would be a matter of detention. Although I expected isolated incidents nothing was reported.**







*Paul Ronge recalls: "The old company appeared to be a rough bunch. We however did not allow them to mess with us, even though we were bush-rookies. My "ouman" and I naturally got along just fine. He even gave me his cravat. But there was an incident in our tent - Cpl Kobus Pieters whacked one of the "oumanne" because he made such a fracas on the night when they shot flares all over the base."*





*Dawid Momberg recalls: "In the beginning of December we flew to Grootfontein with the "flossies" (C130 or C160 cargo planes). From Grootfontein we were carted to Omuthiya with big, white trucks. At the turn-off to the base, we were told to get off and to line up. Then we had to run to the base in our platoons. The "ouman" troops were really making a big noise. It was apparently tradition that the "oumanne" received the new troops like that. Personally I thought it was just a lot of crap. Then this red-headed Major arrived and strolled up and down in front of the company - not saying a word. And he looked extremely grumpy. Suddenly he says: "I am Major Dawid Hermanus Lotter from Klerksdorp. Klerksdorp is on the map because I'm coming from there." My first thought was: "Sh\_t, and now we're getting a crazy Major!"*



*Pieter Prinsloo recalls: "The bunch of "oumanne" that awaited us were rather strange. More strange however, was the redhead with the Livingstone cap, the Ritmeester cigar and the ominous look in his eyes. He was waiting for us at the end of the run from the tar road to the camp."*







*Stelios Moraites recalls: "We stopped at the white road and this bunch of dirty, faded troops, wearing "vellies", started shouting and ranting at us. They told off our poor lieutenant (Du Preez) fairly badly in my opinion. As I was probably very hard-assed it didn't bother me much though. The Churchill speech was impressive, to say the least, but I really thought our Major was a bit of a clown at that time!"*









*"You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word. It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival."*

*Winston Churchill*



























## Final Ceremonies



With the new Bravo Coy cleared in at Omuthiya, there was only the final parade for the Bravo Coy 1986 on the rugby field in Tsumeb. And then the farewell ceremony in the Tsumeb school hall. The new leadership group of Bravo Company 1987 attended. I summoned them from Omuthiya. On the way to Tsumeb their vehicle experienced mechanical problems. When they arrived at the parade, they were wearing uniforms fairly smeared with diesel stains. Especially 2 Lt Kooij was covered in diesel stains. He grew up on a farm and so understood the process to get the diesel of their vehicle flowing again so vehicle could run again. The consequences on his clothes were sufficient proof.

## Late Arrival

A part of the Anti-Tank platoon did not arrive on the same flights as the main body. They were not subjected to this “rower” initiation. On their arrival they also didn’t know that they were destined to be part of Bravo Coy.



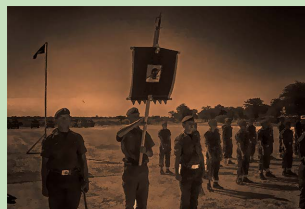
## BRAVO STRUCTURE



There was no support company headquarters at 61 Mech Bn Gp during 1987. The sub-sub units that would normally form part of a support company structure were attached to and under command of the two infantry companies. Alpha Coy (Maj Flip van Wyk) inherited the 81mm Mortar Platoon. The Anti-Tank Platoon was placed under command of Bravo Coy.

When referring to Bravo Coy in this Journal it therefore implies the combination of Bravo Coy's three structural platoons (Call Signs 21, 22 and 23) as well as the two Anti-Tank Groups (Call Signs 71 and 72). This grouping was trained together and deployed in Ovamboland for area protection. It was also maintained as such through Ops Modular and until the end of the year. During the year I did a presentation to Cmdt Smit whereby I planned to divide Bravo Coy into combat elements. I reasoned that the sub unit could be more effective if the sub-sub units could combine structurally, especially in conventional battle preparation. Approval was granted.

The subsequent combining resulted in the following: Call Signs 21 and 71 merged as Combat Element 1, while Call Signs 22 and 72 were known as Combat Element 2. These combinations were not so rigid that it could not adapt to changing circumstance. As such, Call Sign 72 was detached to 32 Bn for the attack on 13 September 1987 during Ops Modular.



## Command Structure



**Company Commander  
Major Dawid Lotter**



**Company Second in Command  
Lieutenant Chris Vorster**

**Company Sergeant Major  
Staff Sergeant Ben Smit**



**Coy Sergeant Quartermaster  
Sergeant Hans Swart**

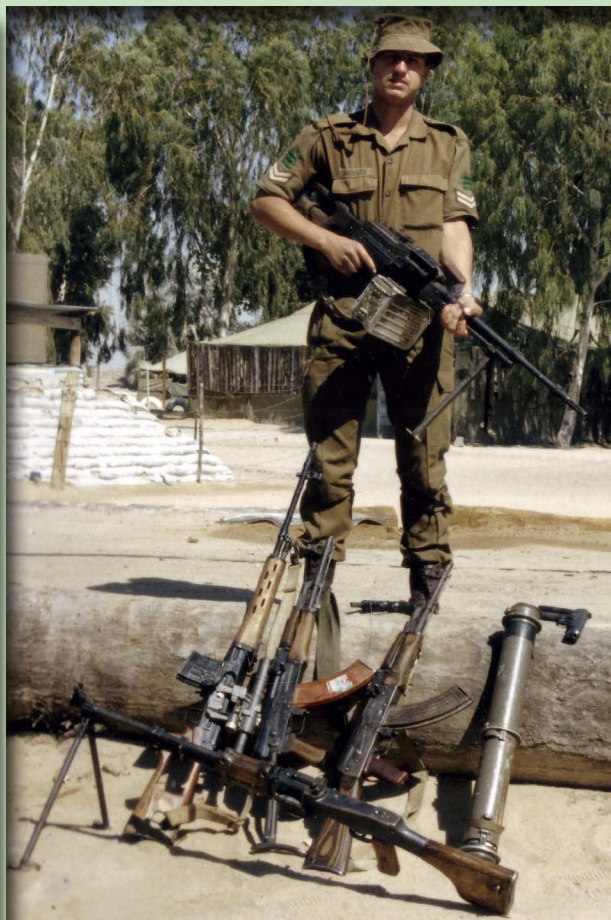




**A1 Echelon NCO  
Corporal George Riley**



**HQ Platoon Sergeant  
Corporal Henry Skinner**





**Platoon 4 Commander**  
**Second Lieutenant Fanie du Preez**



**Platoon 4 Sergeant**  
**Corporal Dries Peyper**



**Platoon 4 NCO**  
**Corporal Herman Kleynhans**

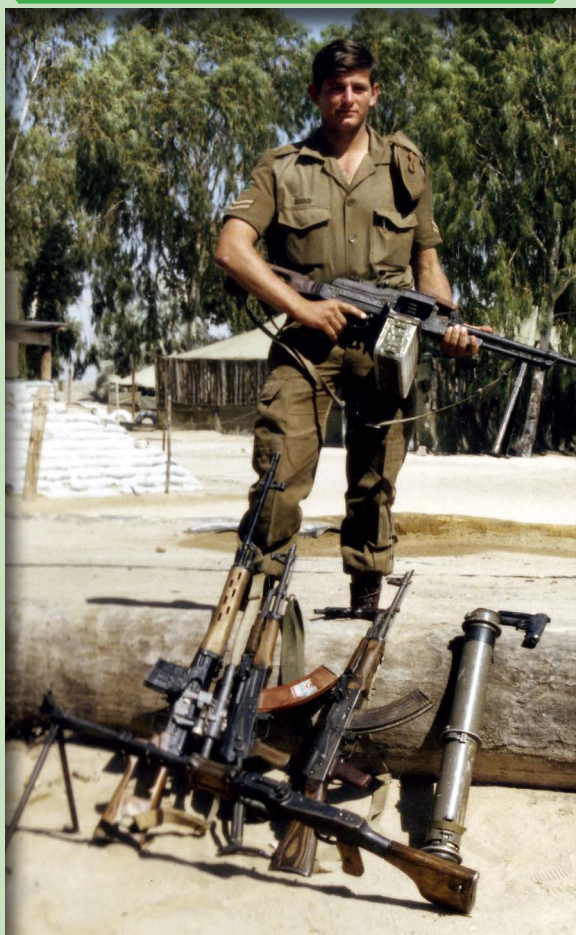




**Platoon 5 Commander  
Second Lieutenant Robert Szafraniec**



**Platoon 5 Sergeant  
Corporal Riaan Rhind**



**Platoon 4 NCO  
Corporal Willie Crous**

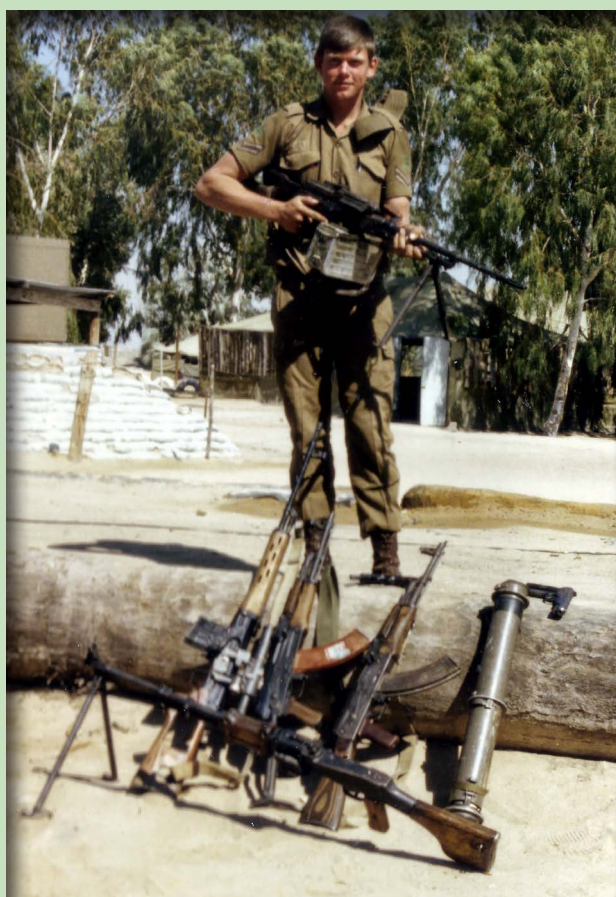




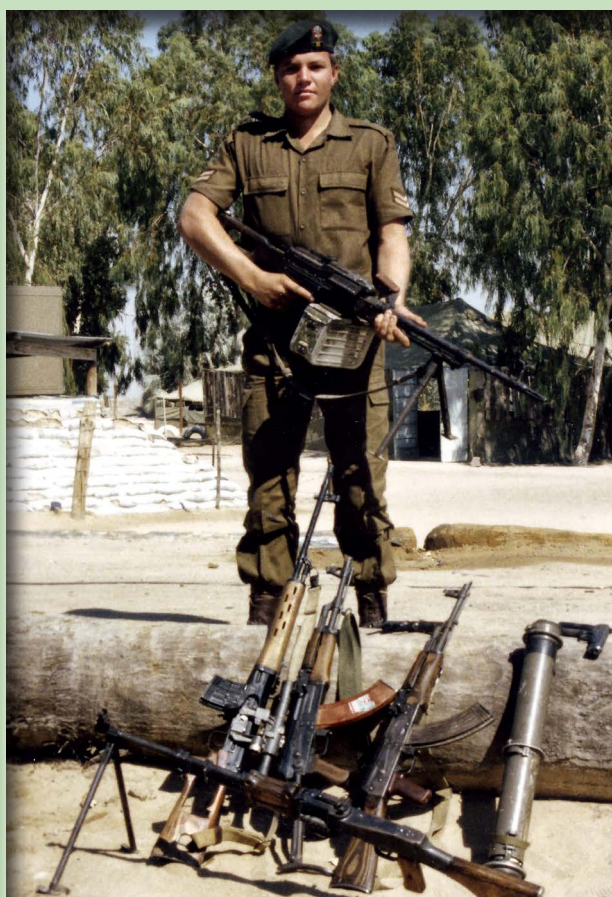
**Platoon 6 Commander  
Second Lieutenant Roelof van Wyk**



**Platoon 6 Sergeant  
Corporal Willie Uys**

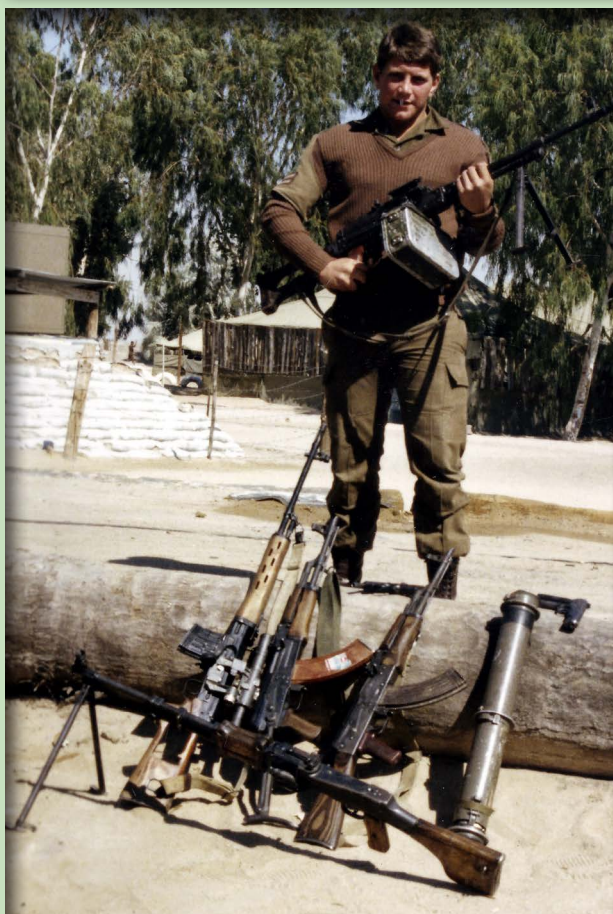


**Platoon 6 NCO  
Corporal Marius van der Walt**





**Anti-Tank Group Commander 71  
Lieutenant Anton Pretorius**



**Anti-Tank Group Sergeant 71  
Corporal Jaco Swanevelder**



**Anti-Tank Group Commander 72  
Second Lieutenant Johan Kooij**



**Anti-Tank Group Sergeant 72  
Corporal Andries Schreuder**

## Call the Roll



### Headquarters

Coy Cdr - Maj	Dawid Lotter
Dwr - Rfn	Van Wyk
Gun - L/Cpl	Karel Koen
Int -Cpl	Hees
Sigs - L/Cpl	-

2IC Lt	Chris Vorster
Rfn	Deon Hattingh
Cpl	George Riley
Cpl	Henry Skinner
Cpl	Kobus Pieterse

### A Tk 71

Gp Cdr - 2 Lt	Anton Pretorius
Gp Sgt - Cpl	Jaco Swannevelder
T/Ldr - Cpl	Cornie Botes
T/Ldr - Cpl	Theuns Cloete
Rfn	Hercules Du Preez
Rfn	Louis Smit
Rfn	Martiens Bester
Rfn	Michiel Smit
Rfn	Oosthuizen
Rfn	Pieter Pieterse
Rfn	Stephanus Le Roux
Rfn	Wayne Bruwer
Rfn	Willemse

### A1 Echelon

CSM - S Sgt	Ben Smit
CSQM - Sgt	Hans Swarts
Rfn	Bekker
Rfn	Coenraad Koen
Rfn	Fanie Van Rensburg
Rfn	Francois Brink Badenhorst
Rfn	Gert Van Dyk
Rfn	Hennie Oosthuizen
Rfn	Jannie Labuschagne
Rfn	Jantjies
Rfn	Johan Potgieter
Rfn	Kunneke
Rfn	Venebales

### A Tk 72

Gp Cdr - 2 Lt	Johan Kooij
Gp Sgt - Cpl	Andries Schreuder
T/Ldr - Cpl	Gerrie Coetzee
T/Ldr - Cpl	Lukas Van Vuuren
Medic - L/Cpl	Andrew Doubell
Rfn	Dawid Momberg
Rfn	Du Plooy
Rfn	Fanus Smit
Rfn	Linus Coetzee
Rfn	Marius Jonker
Rfn	Michael Pheiffer
Rfn	Rheeder
Rfn	Rudi Nuyts





#### **PLATOON 4**

Pl Cdr - 2 Lt	Fanie du Preez
Pl/Sgt - Cpl	Dries Peyper
Pl NCO - Cpl	Herman Kleynhans
Sec Ldr - Cpl	Stelios Moraitis
Sec Ldr - Cpl	CB Fourie
LMG - L/Cpl	Jan Visagie
LMG - L/Cpl	Klasie Van Aswegen
LMG - L/Cpl	Graeme Jefferies
Medic -L/Cpl	Warren Hatton-Jones
Rfn	Abie Schoeman
Rfn	Andrew Oosthuizen
Rfn	Anton Van Coller
Rfn	Ben Venter
Rfn	Bradley Crockett
Rfn	Chris Hoogenboesem
Rfn	Danie Jonker
Rfn	Dave Wiseman
Rfn	Deon Wolmarans
Rfn	Du Toit
Rfn	Eben Pretorius
Rfn	Fanus Greyling
Rfn	Gerhard Dicks
Rfn	Gert Du Toit
Rfn	Gert Vermaak
Rfn	Gibbs
Rfn	Hannes Janeke
Rfn	Hein Swart
Rfn	Jan Viljoen
Rfn	Jannie Brown
Rfn	Johan Erasmus
Rfn	John Welthagen
Rfn	Kobus Swanepoel
Rfn	Koos Naude
Rfn	Leon Louw
Rfn	Nico Van Aswegen
Rfn	Nico Van Rooyen
Rfn	Pieter Prinsloo
Rfn	Ralph Wissner
Rfn	Robbie Pretorius
Rfn	Sammy Gouws
Rfn	Wikus Gibson
Rfn	Willie Wilkens
Rfn	Wolmarans

#### **PLATOON 5**

Pl Cdr - 2 Lt	Robert Szafraniec
Pl/Sgt - Cpl	Riaan Rhind
Pl NCO - Cpl	Willie Crous
Sec Cpl-	Piet Janse Van Rensburg
Sec Cpl-	Jaco Schutte
LMG - L/Cpl	Lowis
LMG - L/Cpl	
LMG - L/Cpl	Eric Du Plessis
Medic - L/Cpl	Johan Lamprecht
Rfn	BJ Smit
Rfn	Broodryk
Rfn	Carel Van Der Merwe
Rfn	Carl Van Der Merwe
Rfn	Chris Blignaut
Rfn	Chris Odendaal
Rfn	Dennis Kemp
Rfn	Dreyer Van Niekerk
Rfn	Ernie de Bruin
Rfn	Ernst Le Roux
Rfn	Frans Snyman
Rfn	G Du Toit
Rfn	Gordon
Rfn	Hattingh
Rfn	Hennie de Bruin
Rfn	Jean Du Plessis
Rfn	Jeremy Spies
Rfn	Johan Kense
Rfn	Koerie Scheepers
Rfn	Koos Vermeulen
Rfn	Lucas Scholtz
Rfn	Myburg
Rfn	Peet Harding
Rfn	Phillip Smuts
Rfn	Pieter du Toit
Rfn	Pieter Henderson
Rfn	Renier Janse Van Rensburg
Rfn	Riaan Fourie
Rfn	Robert Brown
Rfn	Slow
Rfn	Steven Steyn
Rfn	Theuns May
Rfn	Warren Sheridan
Rfn	Willem Grobler
Rfn	Willem Jordaan

# **PLATOON 6**

PI Cdr - 2 Lt	Roelof Van Wyk
PI/Sgt - Cpl	Willie Uys
PI NCO - Cpl	Marius Van der Walt
Sec Ldr -Cpl	Mike Hill
Sec Ldr - Cpl	Darren Vickery
LMG - L/Cpl	Deon Ferreira
LMG - L/Cpl	Andries Kotze
LMG - L/Cpl	John McCrum
L/Cpl	Bryan Greenway
L/Cpl	Kevin Ward
Medic - L/Cpl	Andrew Hahn
Rfn	W Voges
Rfn	Andre Treurnich
Rfn	Bertus Jonker
Rfn	Clifton Sudano
Rfn	Danie Heunis
Rfn	Dawid Van der Westhuizen
Rfn	Dewald Botha
Rfn	Donovan Engelbrecht
Rfn	G Muller
Rfn	Gert Badenhorst
Rfn	Hugo Gerrits
Rfn	JA Van Breda
Rfn	JJ Van Niekerk
Rfn	Johan Pieterse
Rfn	Johan Pretorius
Rfn	Johan Steyn
Rfn	Koos Oosthuizen
Rfn	LA Griffiths
Rfn	LM Volschenk
Rfn	Louis Booyse
Rfn	Louise Denyschen
Rfn	Nico Pretorius
Rfn	Okkie Engelbrecht
Rfn	Paul Ronge
Rfn	Peter Botha
Rfn	Phillip Oosthuizen
Rfn	Piet Engelbrecht
Rfn	Robert Torrani
Rfn	Ronald Britz
Rfn	Ronnie Heunes
Rfn	Sean Hoffman
Rfn	Steve Van der Merwe
Rfn	WS Pieters





## Restructuring the V Echelon



### Original Structure Bravo

#### Headquarters

Ratel 12,7mm Call sign 20 / 29  
Ratel 12,7mm Call sign 20A/ 29A  
Ratel Recovery Call sign 28  
Ambulance Variant Call sign 29J

Platoon 4 (four Ratel 20's  
{Call sign 21/ A/ B/ C )

Anti-Tank Group 1 (Four  
Ratel 90's ) {Call sign 71/  
A/ B /C}

Platoon 5 (four Ratel 20's  
{Call sign 22/ A/ B/ C )

Anti-Tank Group 2 (Four  
Ratel 90's ) {Call sign 72/  
A/ B /C}

Platoon 6 (four Ratel 20's  
{Call sign 21/ A/ B/ C )

A1 Echelon , Ratel 12,7mm Call sign 29 / 29A with logistic vehicles cargo, water.

With these structural groupings of composite combat elements, the exchange of mutual needs was easy. In this way the Ratel 20's anti-aircraft gunners could act as extra loading crew for the Ratel 90's (with a 90mm low-velocity gun as main armament). While the Ratel 90's received extra hands the limited space problem in the Ratel 20's was also alleviated. These mergers proved to be of great value later on. During Modular there were several situations where the Ratel 90's had to maintain an unusually high rate of fire and it was made possible by the extra crew member in the back of the Ratel 90's.

Platoon 6 (Call Sign 23) was also converted into a 60mm conventional mortar group. As such they served a dual purpose – primarily as a mechanised infantry platoon with parallel application as mortar group. This combat element configuration did not have a notable influence on the Bravo Coy echelon but the operational packing plan was reviewed.

## Revised Structure Bravo

### Headquarters

Ratel 12,7mm Call sign 20 / 29  
Ratel 12,7mm Call sign 20A/ 29A  
Ratel Recovery Call sign 28  
Ambulance Variant Call sign 29J

### Combat Element 1

Anti-Tank Group 1 (Four Ratel 90's ) {Call sign 71/ A/ B /C}

### Combat Element 2

Anti-Tank Group 2 (Four Ratel 90's ) {Call sign 72/ A/ B /C}

### Reserve

Platoon 6 (four Ratel 20's {Call sign 21/ A/ B/ C )  
60mm Baseplate mortars

Platoon 4 (four Ratel 20's {Call sign 21/ A/ B/ C )

Platoon 5 (four Ratel 20's {Call sign 22/ A/ B/ C )

A1 Eschelon , Ratel 12,7mm Call sign 29 / 29A with logistic vehicles cargo, water.





## Restructuring the A1 Echelon



The theory of replenishment and support was that each sub-sub unit's backpacks, with sleeping bags and spare clothing, were transported on each sub-sub unit's echelon vehicle. The echelon commander would then make each sub-sub unit's echelon vehicle available when going into a laager - and withdraw it again in the morning.

The doctrine was that the crew of a Ratel would only carry their battle jackets and chest webbings. This however caused challenges as the echelon would not necessarily join the combat elements each evening. I did a presentation to Cmdt Smit whereby I requested that all backpacks be returned to the main store in the base. The individual's packing plan was then changed to a micro containerised system.

Each member received a 20mm ammunition case wherein they could pack personal items like clothing and shaving kits. The ammo cases were then stacked in the aisle next to the Ratel's engine compartment. This ensured that everyone had access to their personal kit at all times. The combat elements would therefore not be bound by the movements of the echelon. The same ammo cases were also used as washbasins. Advantages of this system were proven throughout the whole of Ops Modular. Other sub units, working on the old system, arrived in the first laager area in Angola with their backpacks – which then ended up in the isle next to the engine compartment. Limited space inside the Ratel was therefore even more cramped, while it also added to the fire risk. This change in packing plans afforded Bravo Coy/ATk much more flexibility.



## Our Facilities



***Our Offices:*** The Bravo Coy HQ was part of a corrugated iron complex consisting of four offices, two of which were assigned to Alpha Coy. The two Bravo Coy offices housed the company commander and the 2nd-in-command. Lt Vorster's office was also the general admin office. There was a large signpost in front of the commander's office with the famous words of Churchill: "You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word. It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival."

***The Blockhouse:*** The PH de Villiers Blockhouse was built next to Bravo Coy lines during 1986. It contained two offices, one for the Pl/Gp commanders and one for the Pl Sgt's/Pl NCO's/Gp Sgt's. Due to space restrictions in the CSQM store the Blockhouse also served as storage space during deployment.



**Blockhouse Under Construction 1986**



***Our Store:*** The Bravo store was part of the main QM (Quarter Master) store.



***Our Vehicle Park:*** Our vehicle mustering area was south of the Bn HQ. All stable parades and vehicle maintenance were performed here. This was also the place we spent most of our time when not deployed – at our Ratels!

***Our Home.*** We lived in 4x4 meter tents with cement floors. The 12 volt light-bulbs illuminate the tents in the prescribed times and when the Base Generator “Ou Lizzie” was running. Our Bravo Town was newly renovated in 1986 by upgrading the urinals and the walkways. During 1987 Bravo carried on with the upgrading.



***Our Ablution:*** The Bravo shower complex was a corrugated iron building about 100m from the company lines. It was repaired and repainted in 1986 and was also used as a place to have Bravo Coy barbeques.

***Our Camp:*** We had a theme for each of the “suburbs” (sub-sub unit blocks). The tent blocks were also named after the Roman encampments around Asterix’s village: Laudanum, Compendium, Aquarium, Totorum and others. The “streets” between tents had the following names, among others: Via Principales (the main “street” to the parade ground), Via Magnorum, Via Apia, Via Pretoriana, etc. The Asterix and Obelix characters were used on name boards in front of the blocks of tents to provide a bit of colour.



***Our Mess hall and Canteen:*** We were served our meals in the Omuthiya combined hall. Each sub-unit had its own block. Adjacent to this was our canteen stocked with our basic needs like soap, soft drinks, candy etc. It was also a gathering place when off duty and to watch videos.

***Omuthiya Coffee Bar:*** This was managed by the unit chaplain. Should one want to do Bible study, this was the place to go. Or just read the newspaper and have a coffee and rusks. A small contribution was deducted from ones pay to fund this.

***Omuthiya Steakhouse:*** A facility managed by C Sqn and offered a decent steak and salads and a bottle of wine. It was run like a commercial enterprise.

***Omuthiya “Braaituin”:*** Adjacent to the Mess Hall was our barbeque area. This facility was available for anyone and meat packets were available.



The exciting dynamic development of recreational facilities for members of 61 Mech at Omuthiya would make even Sol and his Sin City falter. In the middle of nowhere, a catering and amusement complex is being built, and, as with every other project, is under the control, assistance and vision of kmdt Smit.

The complex adds to the already existing troop canteens and officer's Country Club. It includes a Steakhouse, Tavern, Braaigarden and NCO bar, in other words it is a complete "VTB" closed system where troops can unwind and relax every evening - the end result being a troop whose whole work ethos is positively influenced by a real break at the end of day.



***Omuthiya Swimming Pool:*** The large swimming pool north in the base was built in 1981 but needed a lot of care to stay clean. Some members who didn't mind the green brackish water used it.



***East Base:*** This was the part of Omuthiya where the leader group lived. It had a large bar lined with white teak panels. There was a reasonable but small swimming pool and large barbeque area. There were 4 guestrooms for visitors to the unit and two park homes with six sleepers each to accommodate sleepover unit members from Tsumeb HQ.



**My Hut (Dawid Lotter)**

### ***Routines***

**When Bravo was not deployed, we maintained the usual unit routines.**

**06:00 The 61 Meg generator (Old Lizzie) was switched on.**

**Beds are made and tents floors swept.**

**06:30 Coffee and biscuit / bread in the mess hall.**

**07:00 Platoon inspection.**

**07:30 Roll call and weapon inspection.**

**08:00 Daily tasks such as maintenance on vehicles and base facilities.**

**11:00 Brunch (Breakfast and Lunch).**

**11:30 to 15:00 Daily tasks such as maintenance on vehicles and base facilities.**

**16:00 Fitness exercises.**

**17:30 Dinner.**

**18:00 to 21:30 Own program.**

**21:45 Quiet time.**

**22:00 Lights out.**





*John McCrum recalls: "Paydays at 61 were a bit of a mixed blessing, we had to queue for hours for peanuts and invariably we would somehow manage to piss off the platoon commanders ending up getting chased around 'the flagpole (2 Km away). We didn't usually need to buy too much soap/toothpaste/razor etc, only the needs that one didn't get in your care package from home. We tried to keep as much of our money as possible to buy booze at the tavern of the occasional meal at the 'steakhouse' a restaurant we had on the base, it was only open at certain times and difficult to get bookings. Occasionally we'd get a day pass into Tsumeb (about 1 ½ hours from Omutiya by Kwêvoel). That was an opportunity to draw more money, shop, swim at the pool. Drinking was a bit risky, if you went back to camp smelling of booze that was big trouble!!"*

### Corporal Punishment (Lyfstraf)



This was strictly forbidden. However, from time to time it was necessary to break the rule. It made little sense to chase a serious offender on the parade ground. It just produced a tired member who needs energy more than physical training punishment.



## FIRST EXPERIENCES



### *Diary - Theuns Cloete*

*11 – Thursday: About two and a half hours flight to Grootfontein. Another three hours driving in open trucks to Omuthiya. We were soaking wet. Arrived, got blankets and slept.*

*15 – Monday: - We signed for our Ratels. My Ratel 90 callsign 71C is in a bad shape. I hope it can be repaired.*

*16 – Tuesday: Draw TOTE (Table Of Tools and Equipment) and cleaning. This is also in a bad shape.*

*17 – Wednesday: Rehearsals for battalion parade.*

*18 – Thursday: Battalion parade.*

*23 – Tuesday: Calibrate and shooting in our 90 mm canons and do some vehicle movements on the training range.*

*24 – Wednesday: Base cleaning. Christmas eve.*





## The Bravo Oath



Bravo Coy 1987 was sworn in during a ceremony in January 1987. I hoped that the tradition would take hold and be carried forward but the war and other factors prevented it.

Therefore this taking-of-the-oath ceremony was held both for the first and the last time in 1987.

With the oath the whole Bravo pledged their allegiance to 61 Mech Bn Gp. The attached symbolism was: First commemorate fallen comrades, then the unit. The leader group was first to solemnly pledge the oath, individually and in sub-sub unit groups. They did so while kneeling on their combat helmets in front of Cmdt Smit. As soon as each person completed the oath they were touched with the banner.





The leader group then returned to their lined up sub-sub units where the oath was carried further. It was followed by a march past and salute to Cmdt Smit on the podium next to the memorial needle. I cannot remember the precise words anymore but it had the following element: Loyalty to the Fatherland, the Unit and the Sub unit.



























1987

Proudly stood our ground  
In African soil far from safe and sound  
In search of the enemy  
In search of longed for victory

From loving homes we were torn  
For true soldiers were reborn  
In bushes we fought far and wide  
Over Ovamboland with pride

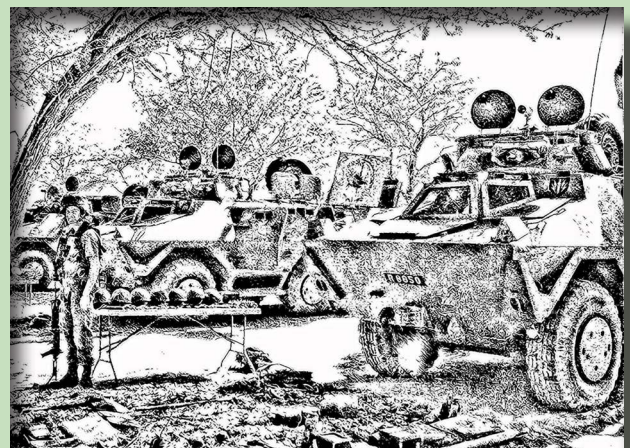
In danger most of everyday  
But from the fight we will never stray  
Thankful for sunrise through the dew  
Another day to prove what we knew

Time and time again  
Soldiers we remain  
We knew how to take the lead  
For we want our enemy to plead

Men we became  
After war never the same  
In our Ratel against all odds  
We live another day thanks to God

We took bullets and gladly so  
Our enemy fell in a row  
We came deadly close to Heaven  
In 1987

© Elizma Grobler





## Omuthiya Special



The Omuthiya Special was not unique to Bravo Coy. It originated somewhere between 1982 and 1983 as incorporation ceremony of a new leader group.

The leader group had to “earn” their stay in the East Base through this ceremony. It involved the drinking of an alcoholic brew. The history of the Omuthiya Special was not overly glorious. A corporal of the previous year came close to death due to alcohol poisoning. During 1987 Ben and I decided that we should at least control it and it was therefore converted into a ceremony.

The various sub-sub unit leader groups of Bravo Coy were all marched in by Ben. They were then ordered to drink the brew from specially engraved beer mugs, followed by a formal signing of the Omuthiya Clubhouse register. Ben and I then later ensured that each one got to their respective sleeping quarters. The uncontrolled ceremonies of the other sub units took its normal toll. As far as I remember the Bravo Coy leader group only woke up with a severe headache the next morning.









*Jaco Swanevelder recalls: "The Omuthiya Special ceremony was preceded by a "welcoming", specifically for the NCOs. We were subjected to an information session (good and proper) by our "oumanne", as well as a flag raising ritual, where a pink ladie's G-string had to remind us of what we would miss for the next year. Then the ceremony took place. The concoction consisted of a tot of all types of hard liquor in the Country Club. The Advocaat liqueur ruined the whole Special in my opinion! The Special then had to be chased with a warm Longtom Black Label beer. For some or other reason the potentially deadly concoction did not have an immediate effect on Schreuder and I. What I remember further is highly debatable. The beer mugs in which the Omuthiya Specials were served were also specially engraved to commemorate the occasion."*



## Omuthya Christmas 1986



Christmas 1986 was, as is usually the case if one is not home with family and friends, both a cheerful and sad day. The kitchen and 61 Mech Ladies Association put in a lot of effort to create a festive atmosphere - but everyone still longed for home.

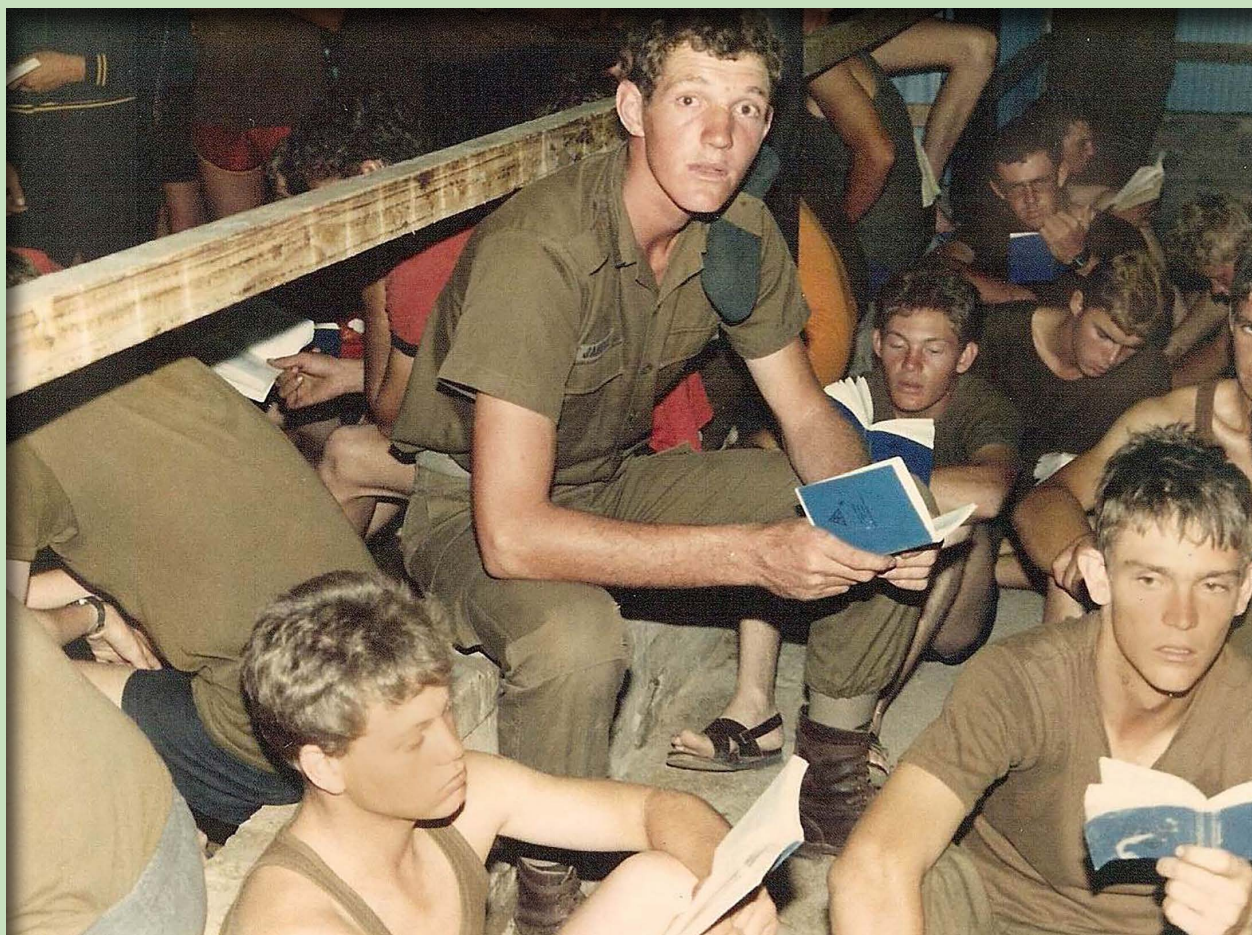
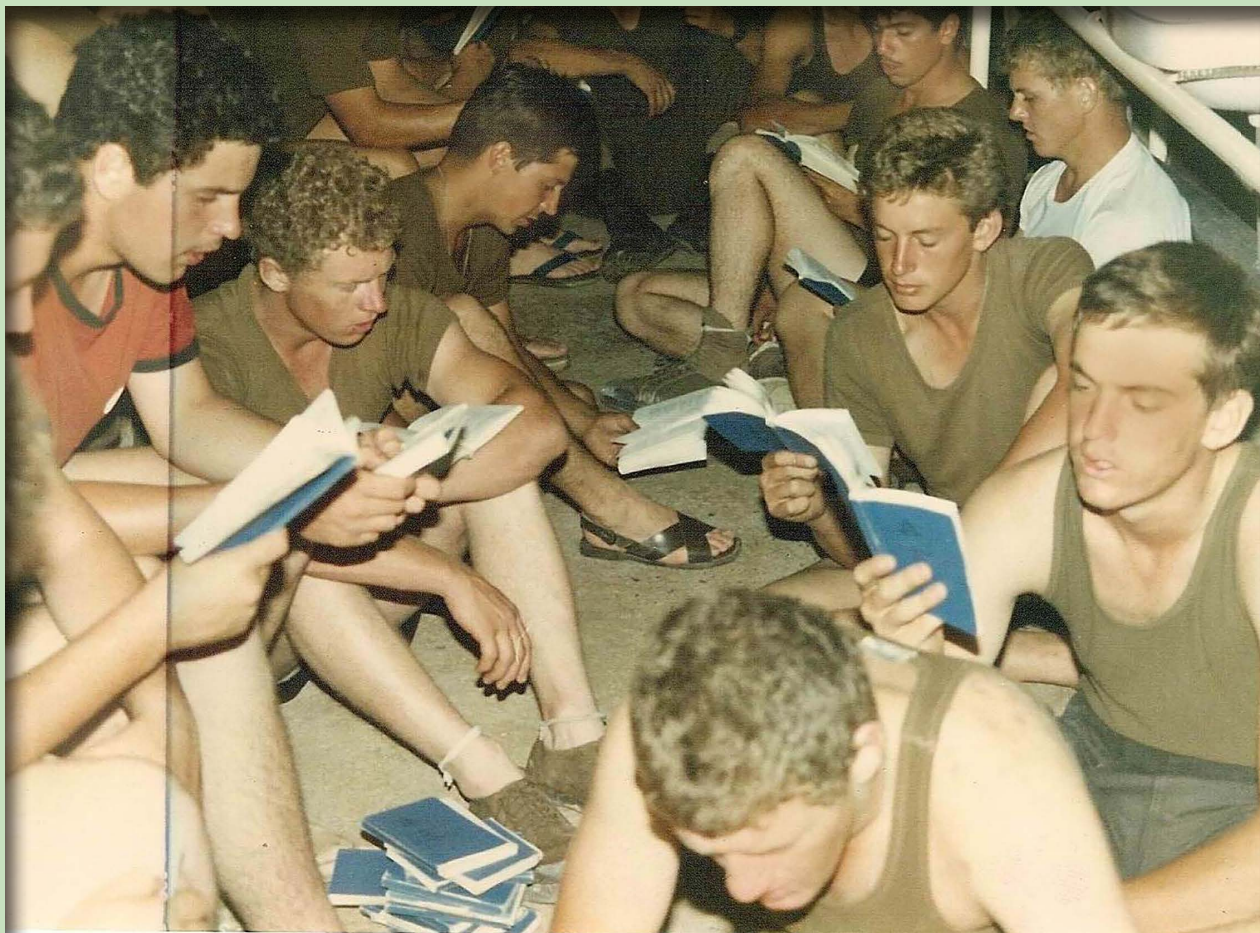
The evening before Christmas Bravo Coy got together in the shower complex to practice Christmas hymns. The singing ability of the members was rather poor and the corrugated iron walls of the building did not help the acoustics much. We were however slightly better prepared to sing together as a group.



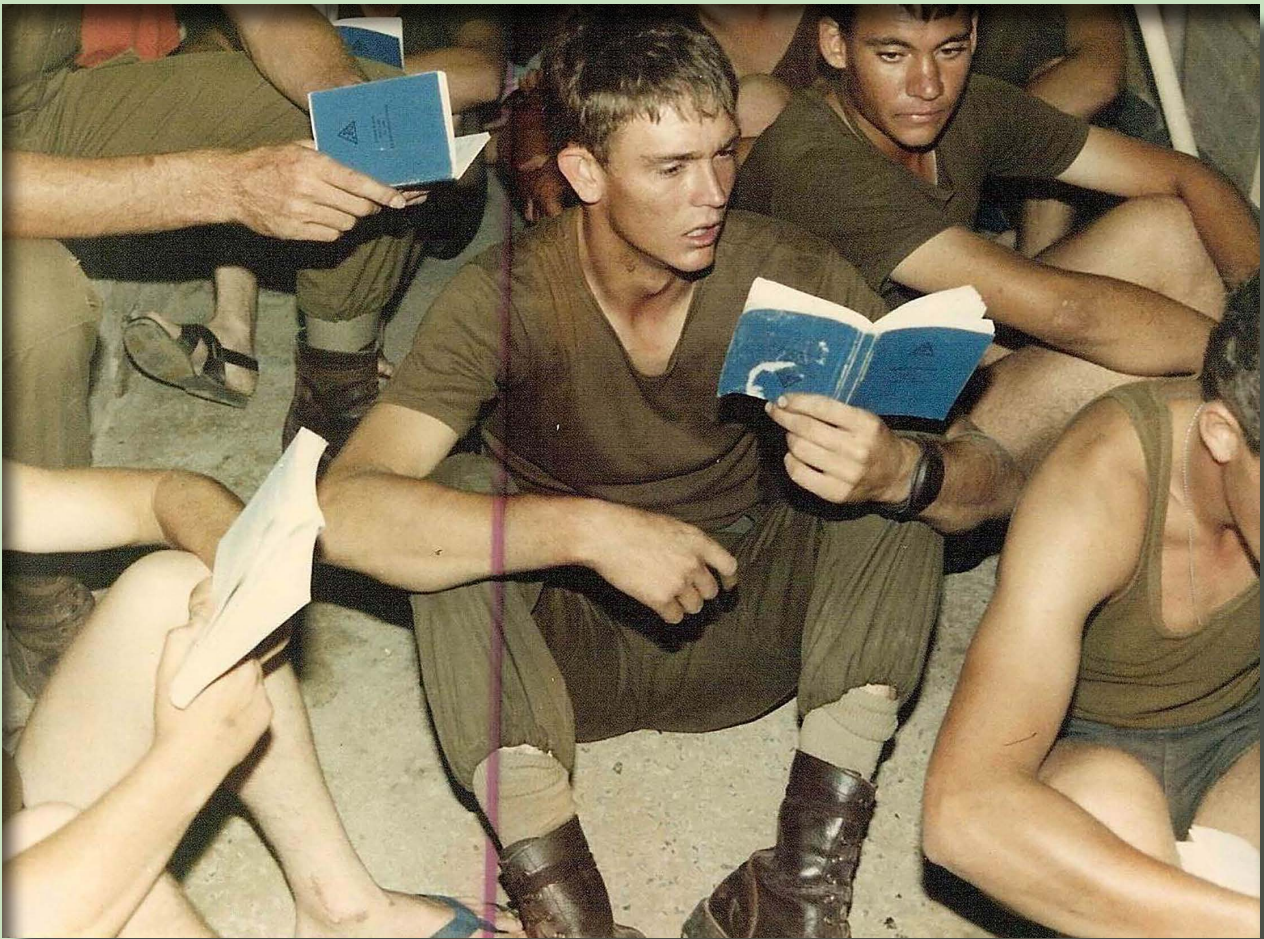










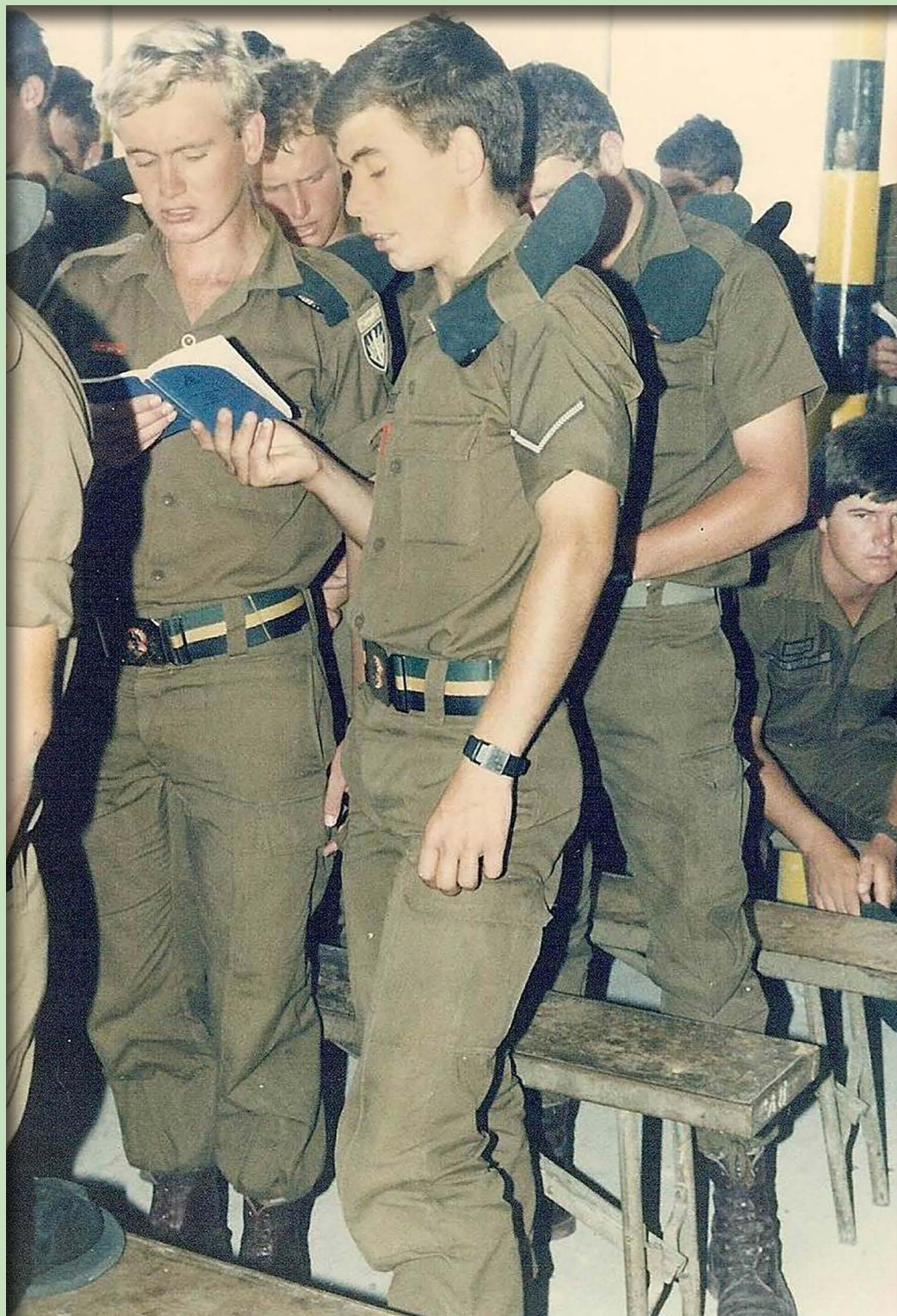




## Christmas Sermon



**Bravo led the singing during the Christmas service on 25 December. The service was held under roof of the tank hanger and the Olifant tanks were shifted out to create space, with the exception of two or three that couldn't be moved. These large iron monsters gave quite a special character to the service.**









## Christmas Lunch



The service was followed by a Christmas meal in the mess hall. It was one of those extremely hot Ovambo summer days. That was a Thursday, and we started training in all earnest on the Friday already.













## Our Bravo Camp - Our Pride



### LAST FEW HOURS (1986/12/31)

I've come to the end of another year,  
The last few hours tick by without fear,  
Far from the loved ones at home,  
On the border, without my friends, all alone.

I sit bowed on my bed,  
My hands supporting my head.  
My mind in the one hand and my soul in the other,  
All sober, with no one to bother.

My mind goes on paths far away,  
That lead to nothing in no way,  
With pictures of happiness,  
Concealing my own unhappiness.

I light up another cigarette  
To try and conceal the facts I can't forget,  
But the facts surround me in every way,  
To be accepted, day by day.

My thoughts build up a false image,  
And with every thought,  
The year draws to a close.

© Hugo Gerrits

Written Dec 31 '86. Just arrived on border, 61 Meg.  
No clue that '87 would be a year to remember for all time.

























## TRAINING



### Retraining



Training was a continuous process. We could distinguish the different facets but they could not be separated. One new skill flowed into the next. By the time Bravo Coy arrived at 61 Mech Bn Gp at the beginning of December 1986 they already had nearly a years' worth of training.

At 1 SAI Bn they went through all the training phases of being a soldier. They were prepared gradually with basics-, individual-, team-, section-, platoon- and company training. That was followed finally by combat team and combat group exercises where they learned to work along with other service groups.

The Anti-Tank group received training at the School of Armour and the Mechanised Leader Wing. This training took place at De Brug and Lohathla (Army Battle School). Experience however taught that a conversion training phase was necessary for all new sub units in Ovamboland.

Terrain, climate and conditions were totally different from that at De Brug and Lohathla. The deep sand and dense bush at Omuthiya posed unique challenges – driving, navigation, deployment and replenishment, to name a few. Previously learnt drills like fish boning, actions ahead, left and right, pulling into a laager, replenishments and more had to be adapted to suit the different conditions.

### Equipment Awareness



Bravo Coy maintained well organised and strict equipment awareness. We were taught continuously that South Africa was financially besieged by sanctions etc. There was no money to be wasted. Our very survival on the battlefield depended on maintaining and caring for our equipment. At the end of 1986 the total loss was R1.98 after a years' worth of training. I think it was a lost screwdriver or something. Sgt Hans Swartz signed over a well organised store from the 1986 group.



## Stable Parade



**Mechanised forces have as their ancestor the dragoon and the cavalry man. Dragoons originally were a class of mounted infantry, who used horses for mobility, but dismounted to fight on foot. Cavalry fought on horseback. In the modern context it is soldiers who fight in armoured vehicles.**

**As during the days of horses that needed to be stabled and maintained, the mechanised unit's method to achieve this is by the Stable Parade. It involves the cleaning and repairing of every component of the Ratel Combat system; from the hull, engine, radios down to the small but essential Allen key.**

**Periodic stable parades were held throughout the year. Everybody quickly learned that you would pay if you waste or mess up.**































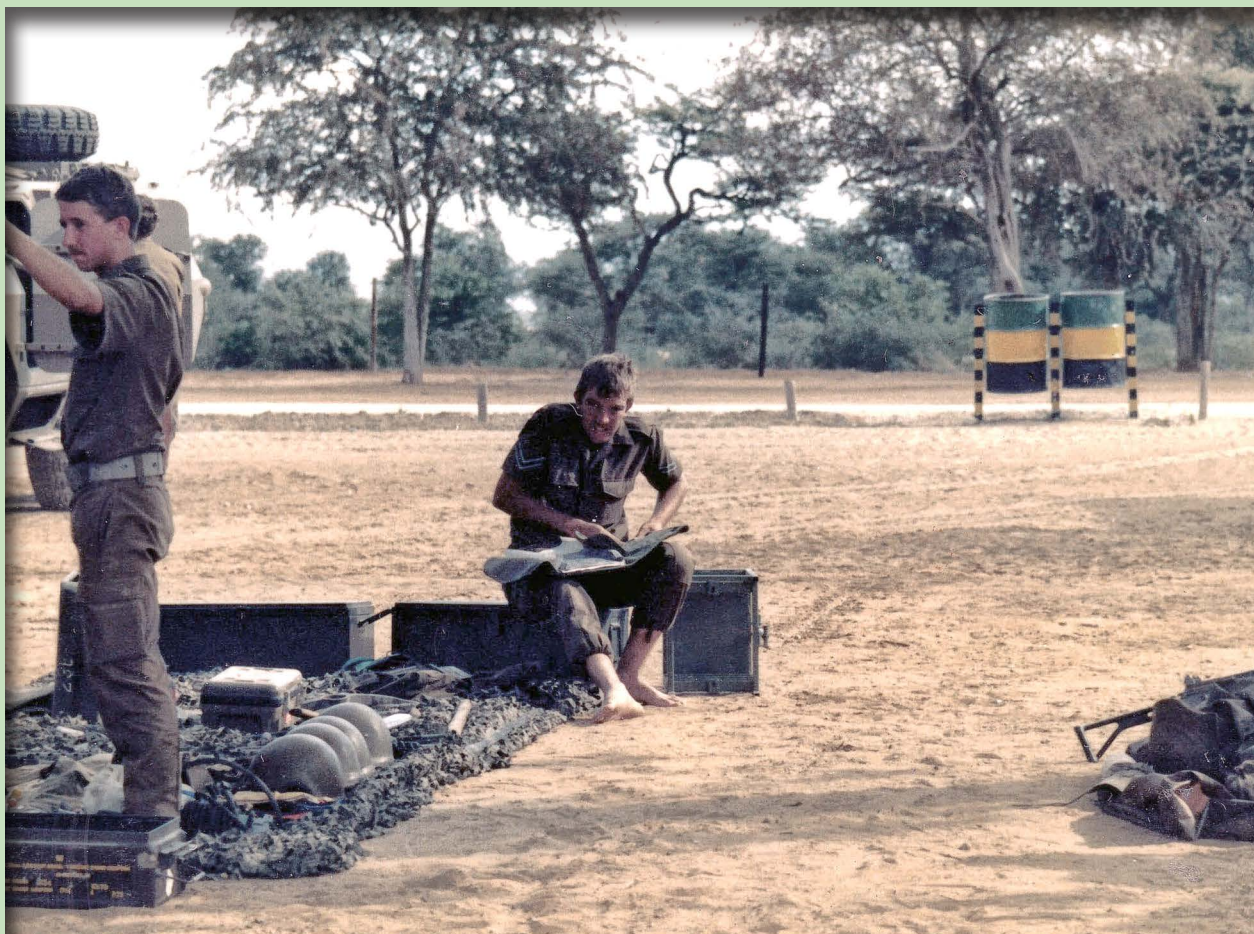








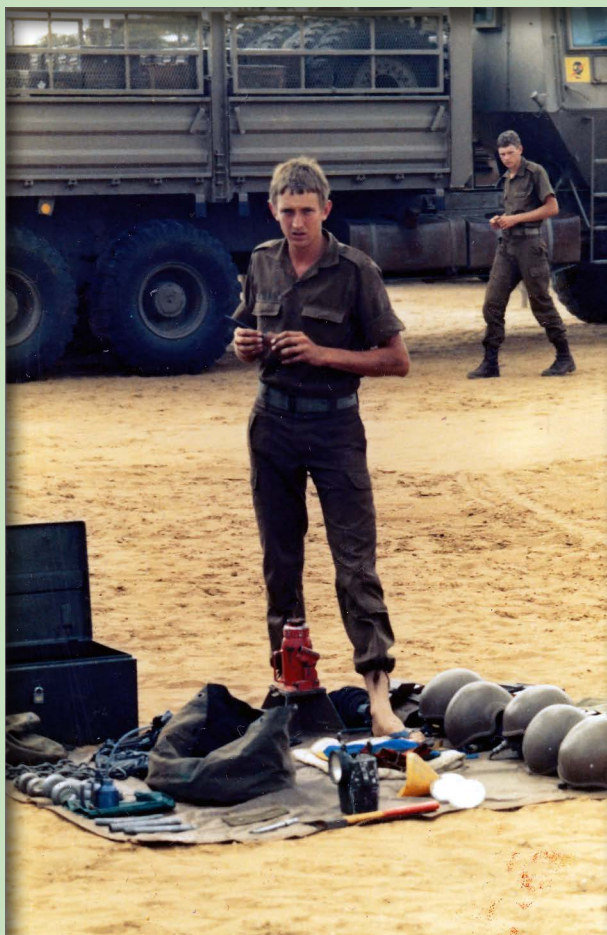


























## Foot Inspection



One of the soldier's important tools of trade are his feet. It was necessary from time to time necessary to call out a sub-unit foot inspection to ensure hygiene. This was necessary only once during Bravo 1987. Everyone had to go through the procedure, officers and men. A foot fungie outbreak can spread very quickly when 11 soldiers were cramped in for days in the 6 square meters of sitting space in the Ratel.









## Mechanised Training



**Omuthiya was ideally located and suitable for mechanised training and retraining. Technical and tactical skills were tested and sharpened. A major aim was to prepare Bravo Coy psychologically for operational deployment. There wasn't a real enemy at De Brug and Lohathla. The biggest enemy there was the instructor and whatever trick was up his sleeve next.**

**The area around Omuthiya, for a fair distance, was relatively safe. But it was still situated in the "Rooi Gebied" (Red Area, also called the Operational Area) and the possibility of SWAPO presence was always there. Omuthiya and the neighbouring training areas were excellent for exercising all phases of the conventional land battle. The advance over long distances could be performed as close to reality as a commander could wish for.**

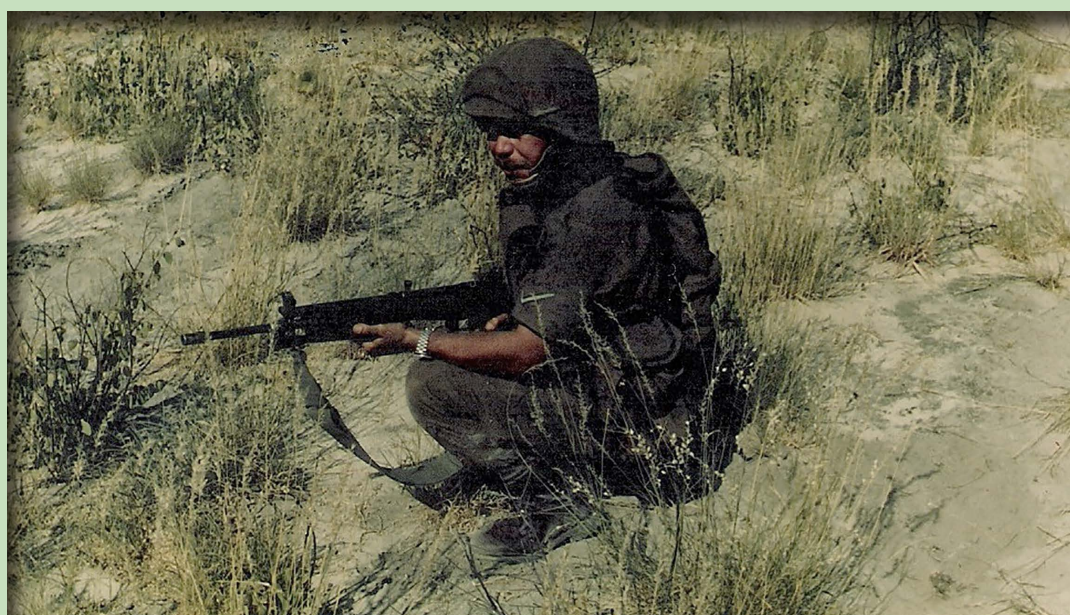
**There were numerous prepared targets upon which every possible attack contingency could be practiced. If such a target did not exist, one was developed as part of the defence phase – just to be attacked later on again.**



The terrain was suitable to refine mobile defence in all its facets. The return journey and the retreat movements of a force, by fighting backwards using stop lines, could similarly be exercised in detail. Realistic fire fights could be simulated as there were very few restrictions on direction of fire. The training field was as close as possible to that of southern Angola, with the exception of water obstacles.

The training was highly realistic, as 61 Mech Bn Gp was a high priority unit with very few restrictions regarding training support. That first retraining phase was seen as the most important. Bravo Coy could be deployed afterwards. However, every opportunity was also grasped to do retraining after completion of territorial operations.

*Paul Ronge recalls: "I only learnt how to effectively use an M26 hand grenade during the retraining phase. It was as if the 1SAI Bn instructors were overly cautious. I only learnt how to throw an M26 grenade into a trench from the outside at 61 Mech Bn Gp. And then, the best training I ever received during my entire stay in the army - instruction by you on the 60mm Patmor mortar. When we did the course during 3rd phase at 1SAI Bn they taught us with safety as priority - if you shoot over the heads of your own troops, you shoot the maximum distance that the weapon was able to. It was you who taught me the self-confidence to land the bombs on the enemy effectively. There are many things that I remember better from the retraining at 61 Mech Bn Gp rather than from the first year's training at 1SAI Bn. Many of the guys complained but they realized, as the training progressed, that there were things they did not know before."*





*Stelios Moraites recalls: "That first training was a lot different from that of 1SAI Bn or Lohathla in the sense that it was a lot more realistic. I did my only camp in 1993 at Lohathla and had to show those young guys, who only did one year conscription, how to properly clear a trench. One of the commanders commented: "Heck, but you are aggressive in the trenches." I am thankful for the valuable training we received before Modular - I was fully prepared for just about everything."*





*Jaco Swanevelder recalls: "Ammunition was never an issue. I can't remember who controlled the magazine, but we never had a problem requesting and receiving as much ammunition as we pleased. Several competitions were held to establish who could maintain the highest rate of fire per minute with the 90's. I cannot remember which team was the fastest but both fire groups could maintain a rate of fire of between 6 and 8 rounds per minute. That also included a couple of linked belts of Browning ammunition. It was the recipe for an unbelievable amount of lead on any target."*





























































































## 2 to 13 February - Counter Insurgency Training



It was practice and compulsory for all units entering the operational area to undergo thorough foot soldier training at Sector 10 Training Unit at Oshivelo. It was not offered by 61 Mech Bn Gp but was the task of the training unit. The philosophy was that all soldiers were a soldier first, and then only a specialist - like Mechanised Infantry, Anti-Tank, etc. He had to be able to be just as effective without a vehicle. In this COIN phase his skills, like bush craft, patrols, ambushes, etc. were sharpened again. He had to realize again that his R4 (assault rifle) was his primary weapon. Most important of all – here they could view and handle different enemy weapons first hand.

### *Diary Theuns Cloete*

*2 February - Departed to Sector 10 Training Unit for COIN training. On arrival we moved out to the training area and established our camp.*

*3 - During the night it rained heavy and we woke up soaking wet. Did foot soldier training for the day. In the evening we moved out for the night and slept in the open field.*

*4 - Was still raining and we stay wet. Day training. Night training. Slept in the open.*

*5 - Same as the previous day. We build our bivvie tents.*

*6 - First morning since we arrived, we were relatively dry. One of the other units had a fatality. Labuschagne from Pearson killed by his section machine gun.*

*7 - Nearly no rain. Whole day training. Night field training and form company temporary base.*

*8 - Slept late and attended a concert by the Canaries in the evening.*

*9 - Walked a very long route and suffered from heat stroke. A large rainstorm during the night kept as all wet.*

*10 - Recovering from heat stroke. Day training. Laying an ambush.*

*11 - Return to main base at Oshivelo for evaluation.*

*12 - Slept late. We had to clean an area with shovel and rake.*

*13 - We won the evaluation. Returned to Omuthiya in heavy rain. Everything was flooded. It was nice to be back in our own base camp. Rested and went to bed early.*







Following evaluations of this phase, Pl 6 was selected as the best platoon for the night ambush since the inception of the training unit in 1980. It was a huge achievement. This phase was experienced with mixed feelings by Bravo Coy.

*Pieter Prinsloo recalls: "I could not understand that foot-soldier training. We basically just arrived when you chased us into the plains. Counter Insurgency training or something, I think. Although we couldn't ask questions, we could still think what we wanted; and I thought it was flipping stupid that a mechanised soldier had to walk on foot! It rained every evening, on top of everything else, and those darn bivvies were not overly waterproof."*



*Cornie Botes recalls: "With that training it was the first time in my life that I had to stay awake right through the night and still keep going the next day. Then you realize that you can stay awake longer than you think."*





*John McCrum recalls: "As for the foot soldier training at Oshivelo - it seemed to me that it rained every day for the entire time we were there. Staying dry was a big problem and keeping the rust off my weapon was very difficult. There were regular inspections on equipment and I covered my rifle with as much oil as I could find. I enjoyed the night ambush,*









## Conversion of Platoon 6 to Conventional 60mm Mortars



Due to the 81mm mortar platoon's affiliation with Alpha Coy it was not always possible to receive 81mm mortar support during training or territorial operations. To ensure realistic and safe exercises or deployments we needed to have good, accurate indirect fire support to be guaranteed.

To overcome this problem Pl 6 was converted for dual purpose application. The store was full of unused conventional 60mm mortar tubes and I decided that I wanted my own mortar fire group. Ben Smit, a capable mortarist himself, started with the conversion training.

Pl 6 would then be the internal, structured Bravo Coy mortar fire group. Their primary task was still to be the reserve of Combat Elements 1 and 2, but with a parallel task as my guaranteed mortars – which meant added responsibilities. Their excellent performance during the COIN phase proved them to be the correct platoon for the demanding task.









The combat element and 60mm mortar combinations provided Bravo Coy with a lot of flexibility. This double purpose conversion would prove to be of great value later during Ops Modular. Their performance on 3 October, where accurate fire on the fleeing 47th Brigade had a definite influence, was testimony to this.

While they were still the reserve force in the mechanised infantry role, they could still apply their main weapons highly effectively over the flood plains of the Lomba River. With their arsenal of 60mm mortar rounds, fired from the conventional 60mm base-plate, they could deliver a large volume of accurate fire on the FAPLA infantry, busy escaping northwards. More about their performance later.

*Paul Ronge recalls: "The extra bombs didn't bother me. I was the only crewmember that could lie down in the Call Sign 23 Ratel. I stacked my cases with bombs to the left of the turret, in such a manner that I could lie down comfortably while we were driving. I swopped the left-hand wire-cage from the driver for a tin of "Vienna's in tomato" so I even had my own personal pantry for my rations the whole time."*





## Trench Crossing



The Ratel had a design restriction as far as trench crossing was concerned, especially deep trenches.

Its main traction was situated at the rear where four wheels could simultaneously provide traction. If the two front wheels fell into a deep trench the back lifted up and sufficient traction was lost. It then had to be hooked up and towed out by another Ratel – not something anyone wanted to experience when under enemy fire!

I designed a drill to circumvent the problem and presented the “backside-forward” application to Cmdt Smit. I believe it was unique to Bravo Coy 1987. Although initially viewed with scepticism it was a drill born out of need. It was not necessarily the best way, but rather that than to be under enemy fire with a stuck Ratel.





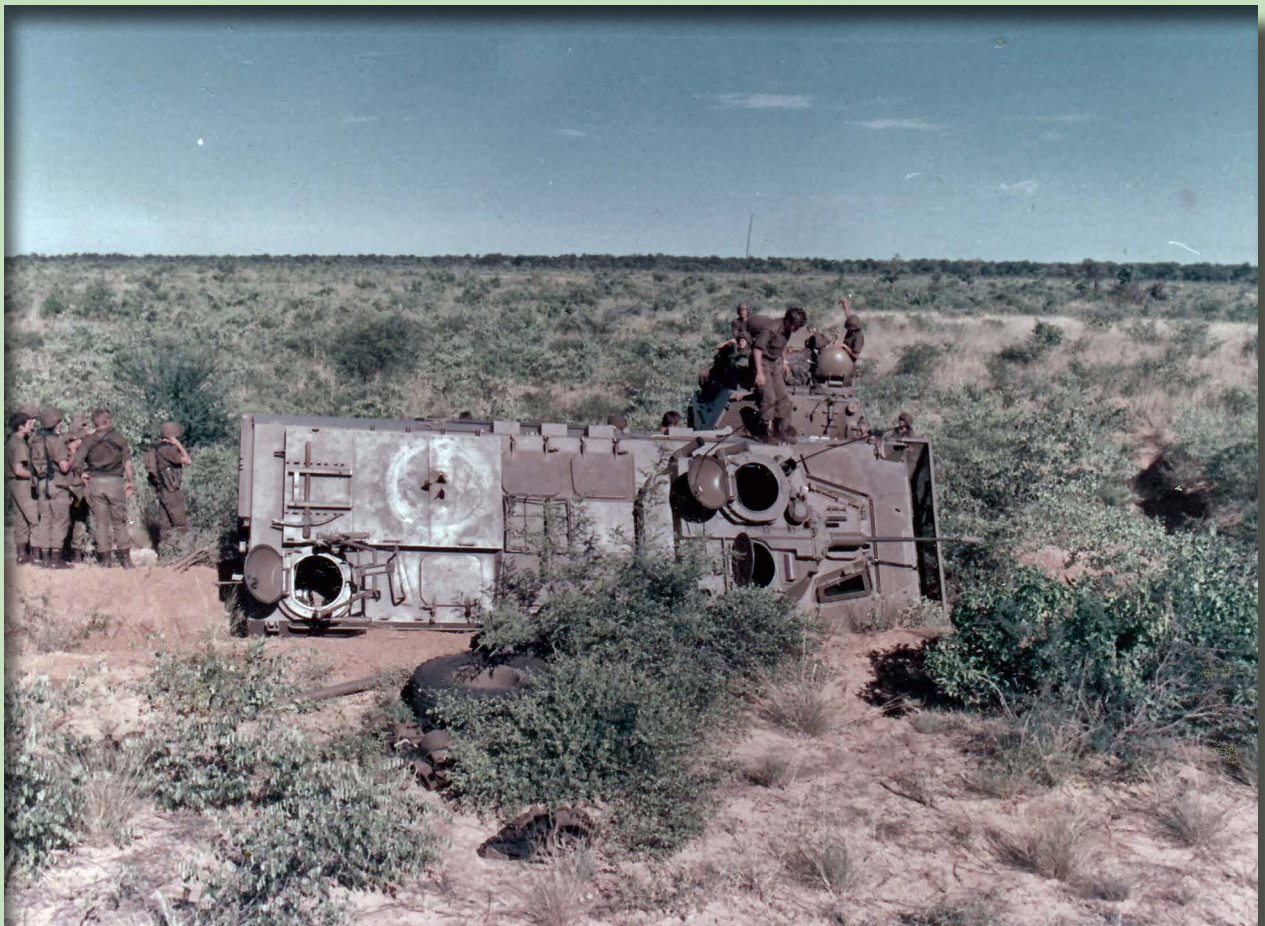
The drill was as follows: Ratel 1 gets to an un-crossable trench and signals it through. Ratel 2 and 3 then get to the trench and provide fire support by speculative fire or a fire belt action, depending on the situation. Ratel 1 turns around with its rear end to the threat. Rear wheel traction brings it across the trench. It then turns around and takes over the fire support of Ratel 2. Ratel 2 turns with its rear end to the threat and Ratel 4 takes over its position. Ratel 2 crosses in the reverse position. 50% of the 4 Ratels are now busy with fire support. Ratel 3 and 4 can now also follow the drill with fire support from Ratels 1 and 2. This drill was later applied in Ops Modular.

This retraining phase was very intensive and placed hard demands on man and machine. The incident that Henry Skinner experienced when his Ratel drove into an old trench was only one of numerous similar close calls. Training was realistic, for sure.

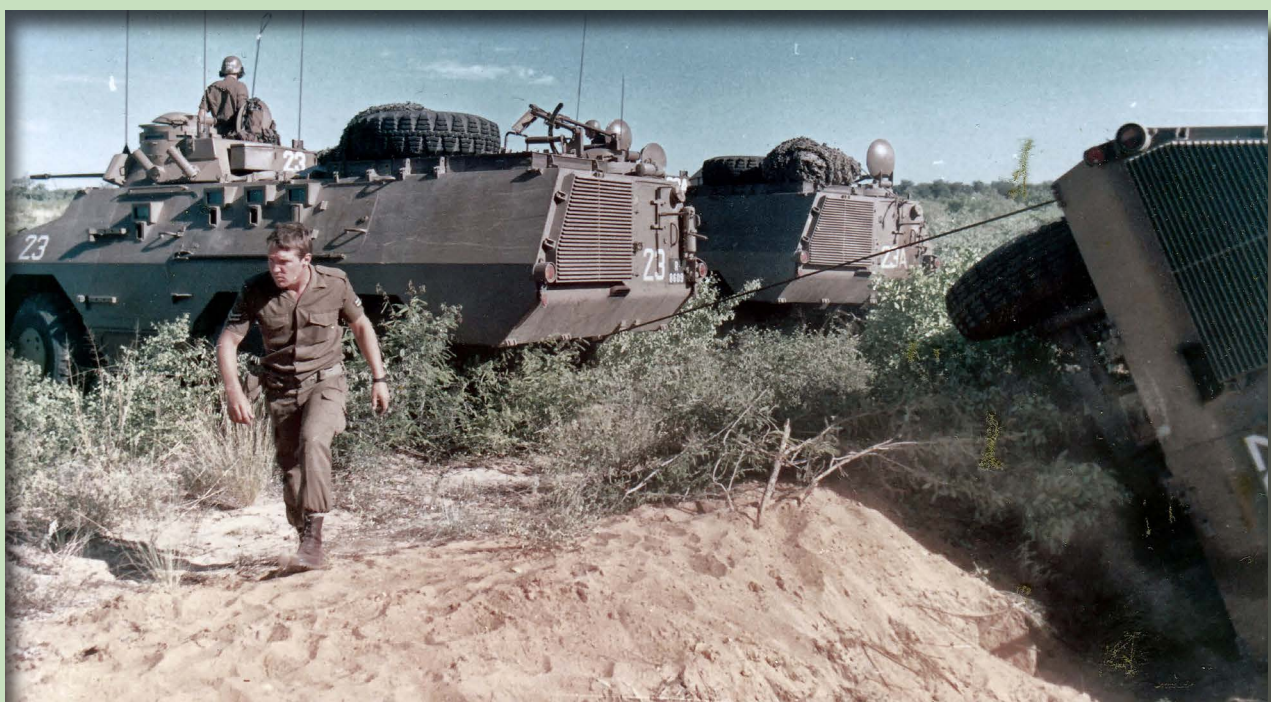
*Henry Skinner recalls: "Those few weeks of intensive training were a period that any normal young man dreams off. We learned so much and I still remember the excitement of learning to operate with so many different units. I remember the Ratel incident and I was in really deep sh\_t. Quite a scary day..."*







*John McCrum recalls: "I was in the right-hand side of the Ratel (light machine gun (LMG) crew, next to the door) when 23C went into the trench. I ended up covered by hundreds of 7.62mm Browning rounds. I eventually managed to crawl out of the top hatch."*





*Robert Torrani recalls: "Van drove our Ratel into the trench sideways. I was standing out of the turret and I saw the trench coming alongside. There was long grass and low bushes so the trench was hidden from the driver, we also came upon it at an angle across us and that's why we are only on our side. The gunner also has very limited vision when in the turret, you are either looking through gun sights or a small sight block. It is one of the things that can happen when you are charging through the bush. I just managed to get into the turret when we went in. The Ratel started falling over. The spare wheel also came off and rolled past. If any of us were out, and got hit by that wheel, it could have gotten nasty."*

















## Recognition and Mechanism of Enemy Weapons.



To know the enemy, its tactics and weapon capability was a vital part of our training.



































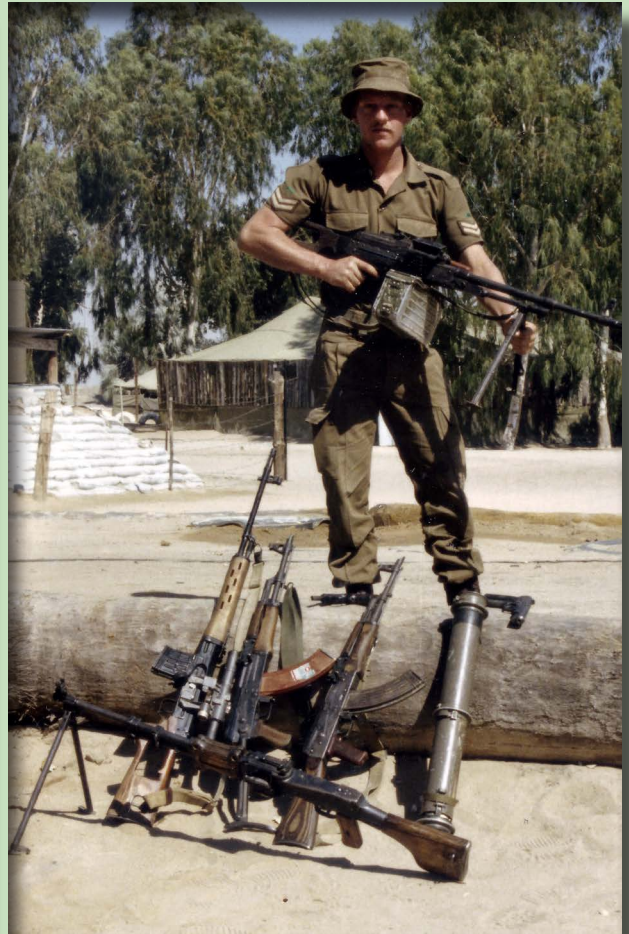


























































## 61 MECH - UNIT EXERCISES



To know the enemy, its tactics and weapon capability was a vital part of our training.

Training can in the ultimate stage only be embedded in the habit of the soldier by realistic exercises. Such 61 Mech exercises had at its aim to consolidate knowledge and skill. We had three major realistic scenarios to simulate the phases of war.

1. The Advance.
2. The Attack.
3. The Defence.
4. The Withdrawal.

Those exercises were:

Ex Andoni Flats. (To rehearse deployment drills and mass formations).

Ex Veni Vidi Vici. (To rehearse all four of the above phases).

Ex Zenula. (Working with the artillery - especially the G6).

### Exercise Andoni Flats

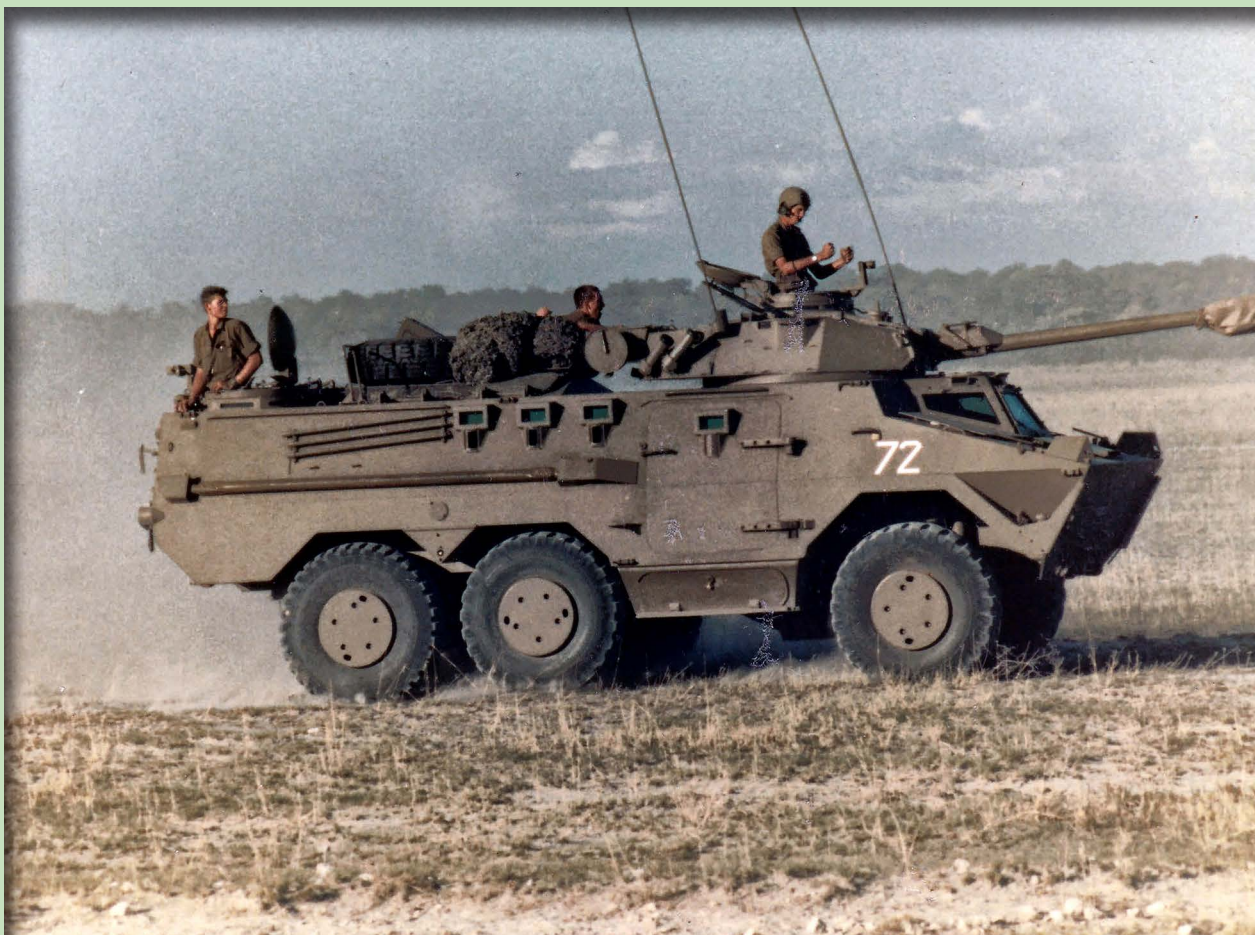


To ensure the understanding of forming a mental picture of one's position in a formation, it started on walking the vehicle formation in the assembly area at Omuthiya. This involved the turret commanders with their drivers and gunners. For a week this on foot exercise was rehearsed daily. Until changing of formations and joining a new group or withdrawing from the fire line became nearly second nature. The time was ripe for exercising this with vehicles on an open plain. This was done on a vast open plain – the Andoni flats. For the first time since their arrival, the sub units could see the whole of 61 Mech in combat formation. Some of the terrain was quite treacherous with a thin crust seemingly solid covering a swampy patch. At least we could also experience the kinetic rope in action.







































## Exercise Veni Vidi Vici



Met 'n gedreun kom 'n Ratel 90 deur die bosse gery op pad om vyandelike stellings te vernietig. Dié Ratel – een van vele by 61 Gemeganiseerde Bataljonggroep – het onlangs deelgeneem aan Operasie Veni Vidi Vici naby Omuthiya in Suidwes-Afrika.

### OPERASIE VENI VIDI VICI

**Troepe voor groot  
uitdaging ... en  
hulle  
wen!**

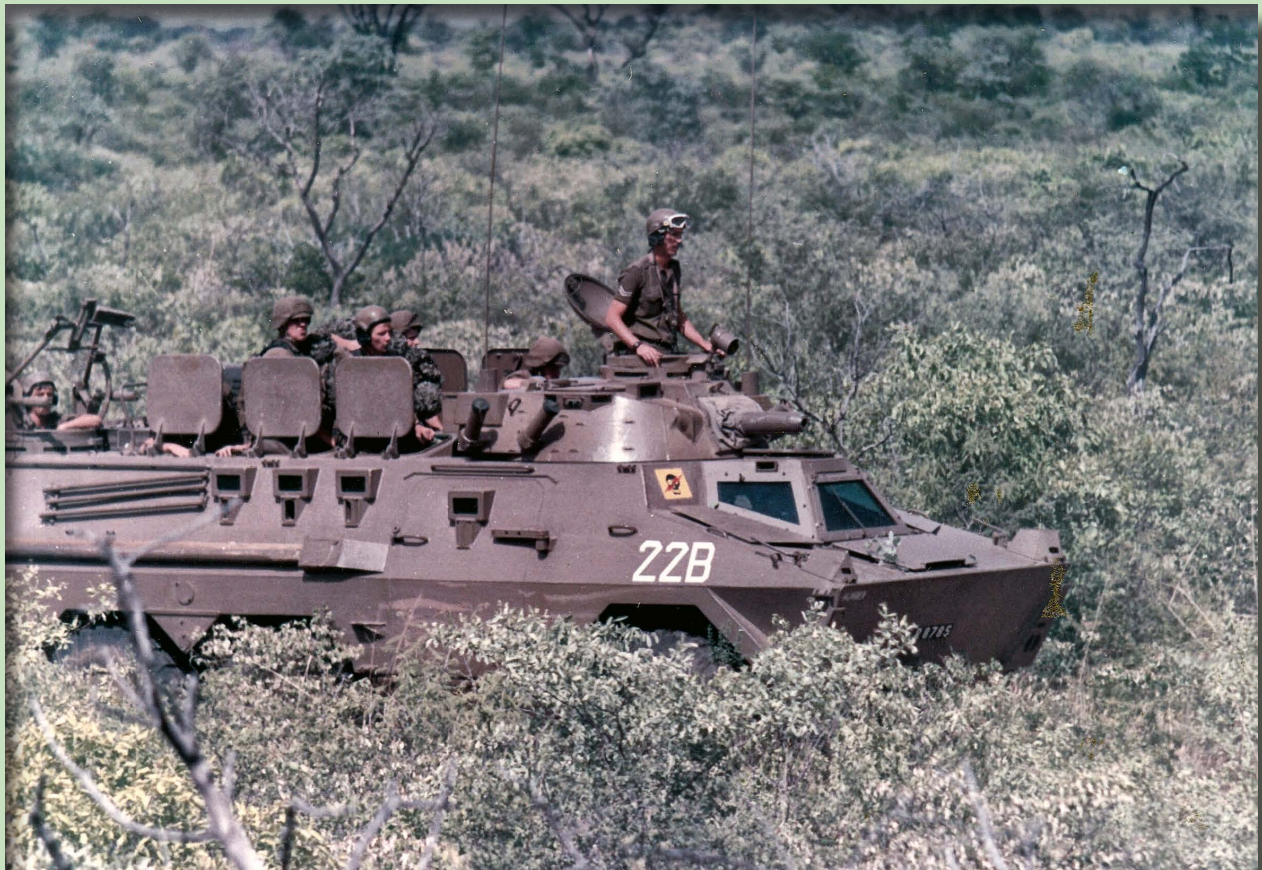
1912 – 1987



STILL CHAMPIONS  
STEEDS KAMPIOENE

Paratus

**D**RIE vyandelike stellings moet binne dertig uur aangeval en verower word. Dít is die taak wat onlangs opgedra is aan 61 Gemeganiseerde Bataljonggroep op Omuthiya, sowat 120 km noord van Tsumeb in Suidwes-Afrika.





Die opdrag het soos volg deurgekom:  
"Die vyand het onlangs 'n offensief geloods en beset nou 'n sekere stuk grond met 'n bataljon bestaande uit pantservoertuie, infanteriste en ondersteuningswapens. Hulle word verder versterk deur vyandelike artillerie.

"Dit is die taak van 61 Meg Bn Gp om die vyand aan te val en te verower sodat ander elemente die aanmars kan voortsit. Omdat 61 Meg Bn Gp 'n konvensionele mag is, moet hy so spoedig moontlik terugkeer en nie die grond beset nie."

Met hierdie denkbeeldige scenario en opdrag is die jaarlikse opleidingsoefening van 61 Meg Bn Gp gehou. "Operasie Veni Vidi Vici" het op Maandag 19 Januarie begin met voorbereiding, beplanning en inoefening, en die daaropvolgende Maandag het die uitvoeringsfase aangebreek.







**M**AANDAG 26 Januarle, 06h00: Die basis is reeds vroeg die oggend in rep en roer. Daar word seker gemaak dat alle toerusting en voorrade op die voertuie is, ammunisie word vir 'n laaste keer nagegaan en teen 15h00 is almai slag gereed vir die aanval.

Ná 'n kort kerkparade het die bevelvoerder van die basis, kmdt Kobus Smit, die manne uitgedaag om die oefening uit te voer sonder voertuigongelukke en 'n verlies van personeel.



Omstreeks 18h00 begin die eerste van sowat 800 soldate in 160 voertuie die basis verlaat. Die doodse stilte van die bos word deur dreunende Ratel-infanteriegevegsvoertuie verbreek terwyl 'n ligte reenbui die skemerte vinnig laat toesak.

Die lede van 61 Meg Bn Gp is aanvanklik by infanteriebasisse opgelei, waarna hulle na Omuthiya oorgeplaas is. Vandaar is die doel van die oefening om die manne as 'n eenheid saam te span, aldus kmdt Smit.

"By 61 Meg Bn Gp ontvang hulle gespesialiseerde opleiding onder nuwe leiers en ons toets dus ook die mate van sukses van ons eie opleiding. So kan ons leemtes identifiseer en deur heropleiding regstel," sê hy.





Op die eerste aand word sowat 230 km platgery om realisme aan die oefening te verleen. Stelling word by die voorversamelgebiede ingeneem en hier word die voertuie gekamoefleer en lê die manne laag tot die volgende middag.



**D**INSDAG 17h20: Doelwit Alpha – 'n tenkstelling – word in swaar reën en 'n sterk wind genader en ná 'n indrukwekkende geveg word die teiken "verower".

Die aanval bestaan uit 'n offensief deur drie infanteriepelotons met pantserkarre terwyl die tenkafweerpeloton as flankwag optree. Die stormpionierpelotons bres en bevestig die mynveld, met die mortierpeloton en artilleriebatterij wat vuursteun lewer.





**F**ASE 2 kom Woensdagmiddag aan die beurt en bestaan uit 'n bataljonaanval op doelwit Bravo. Die teiken word eers met grofgeskut deur die artillerie saggemaak, waarna die hardepuntteikens deur die pantserkarre vernietig word. Hierna ruim die gemeganiseerde infanterietroepe die doelwit te voet op. Die tenkafweer- en lugafweerpelotons lewer ook direkte vuursteun, met indirekte vuursteun deur die mortiere en artillerie.

Die laaste fase van die aanval behels 'n nagtelike strooptog op vyandelike artilleriestellings met die mortiere en artillerie weer eens as bystand. Terselfdertyd word daar begin met die beveiliging van die terugroete.





**V**ROEG die Donderdagoggend is dit die ene stof soos daar in versengende hitte demobiliseer word. Ná drie nagte en twee dae in die bos is Operasie Veni Vidi Vici feitlik iets van die verlede.

Die naam van die oefening – Veni Vidi Vici – I came, I saw, I conquered – som in drie woorde die gees van 61 Meg Bn Gp op. Hier gaan dit nie om speletjies nie. Die manne wat hier diens doen, is al hardgebak deur die son en dikwels deurweek van die reën, maar van tou opgooi is daar geen sprake nie.

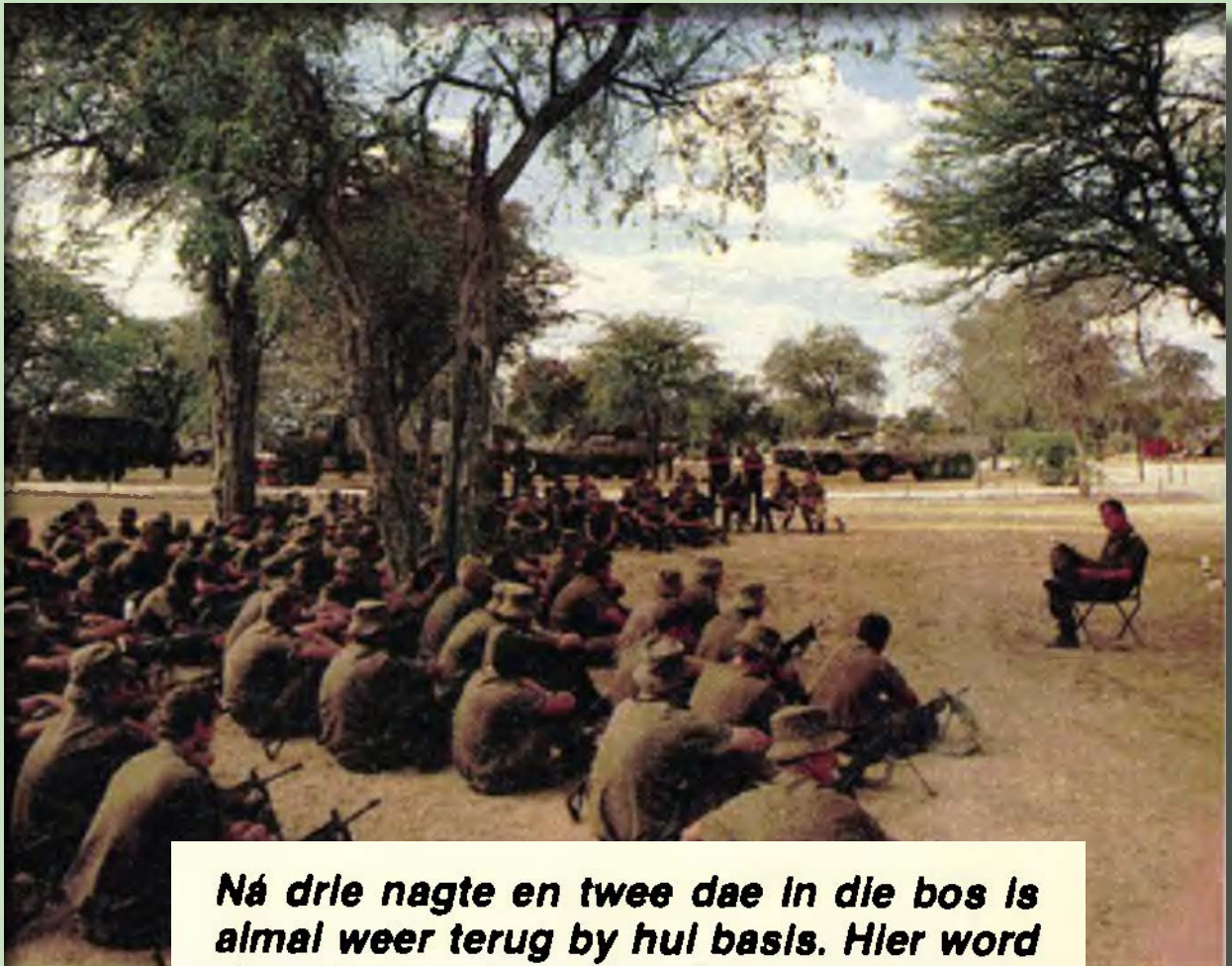
Ná afloop van die oefening het kmdt Smit sy tevredenheid daarmee uitgespreek, maar het bygevoeg dat daar nog ruimte vir verbetering is.



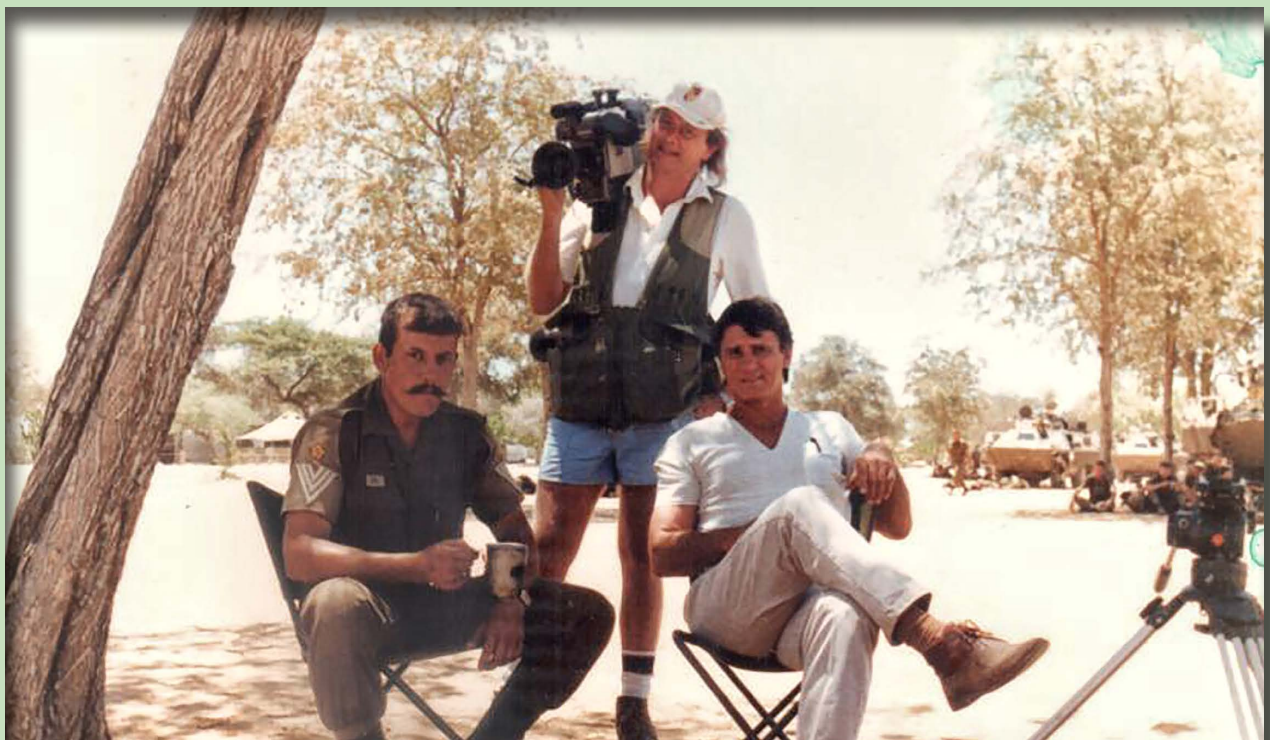
Artilleriebatterij van 61 Meg Bn Gp in  
Met die gevreesde G5-kanon kan  
rand van baie ver aangeval word.







**Ná drie nagte en twee dae in die bos is almal weer terug by hul basiss. Hier word die nabetragting gehou waar leemtes aan die manne verduldellik word. Sulke gebreke sal later deur heropleiding reggestel word.**





## Exercise Zenula



### *Diary Theuns Cloete*

*11 May - Mobilise for Op Zenula.*

*12 - Final inspection. Advance at 04:00.*

*13 - Advance continuo. Rehearse loose skirmishes. Overnight in close laager.*

*14 - Cross the bridge and commence the advance to contact. Find Blue forces and attack.*

*15 - Attacks continue.*

*16 - Attack "Weense Worsie" but the "enemy" abandoned it prior to our attack.*

*17 - Lay in observation positions.*

*18 - Got to know the G6.*

*19 - Final attack. Late afternoon return to Omuthiya.*

'n **K** WÊVOËL vlieg verskrik op. Die boom waarin hy enkele oomblikke gelede gesit het, word skielik platgevee deur 'n rollende 40-ton staalmonster. Die G6 het sy verskyning aan die Grens gemaak!

Alhoewel die bestaan van die G6-self-aangedrewe kanon al vir 'n paar jaar bekend is, is dit nou eers onlangs, tydens **Oefening Zenula** van 61 Gemeganiseerde Bataljonggroep, op Omuthiya in die noorde van Suidwes-Afrika in aksie aangewend.

Die Suid-Afrikaanse ontwerp en vervaardigde G6 Artilleriestelsel bestaan uit 'n 155-mm G6 selfaangedrewe kanon, 'n volledige ammunisiestelsel, meteorologiese stasie, loopsnelheid-analiseerder, artillerie-rekenaar, 'n radiokommunikasiestelsel en 'n spesiale artilleriehelm. Die G6 kan as 'n kanon, houwtser en mortier aangewend word en die kanon, wat op die G5 Ballistiese Stelsel gebaseer is, kan 40 km ver teen 'n vuurtempo van vier rondes per minuut vuur. Dit beteken dat, indien 'n G6 in die suidelike gedeelte van Pretoria geplaas word, dit die noordelike gedeeltes van Johannesburg harde bene kan laat kou. Net so kan Durban vir Pietermaritzburg en Stellenbosch vir Kaapstad lelik laat koes.



1912 – 1987

**Oefening  
Zenula**





**V**OLGENS kmdt Kobus Smit, Bevelvoerder van 61 Meg Bn Gp, was die doel van **Oefening Zenula** om die eenheid in gevegsprosedures in te oefen. "Om dié doel te bereik, is aandag gegee aan offensiewe en defensiewe optredes, effektiewe vloeï van informasie en logistieke beheer, administrasie en bestuur.

"Die oefening het bestaan uit twee veggroepe (Rooi en Blou) wat op verskillende basisse – ongeveer 80 km uitmekaar – gestasioneer is. Die Rooi veggroep ruk dan op om die Bloues se basis aan te val. Die Blou veggroep pas op sý beurt 'n offensiewe verdediging toe om die 'vyandelike magte' sover moontlik te vertraag sodat gepoog kan word om hulle in die proses totaal uit te wis.

"**Oefening Zenula** het aan die 800 troepe wat daaraan deelgeneem het, 'n



unieke geleentheid gegee om op 'n hoogs gesimuleerde basis konvensionele oorlog te ervaar waarby gemeganiseerde gevegselemente betrokke is," het kmdt Smit gesê.





























## 61 MECH FITNESS AND SPORT



A soldier must be mentally and physical fit. This can only be achieved by reaching and maintaining a desired level. 61 Mech subjected all its members to a scheduled mandatory fitness program e.g. The Chief of the Army yearly fitness evaluation like the 25 km walk, the battery test and the 2,4 km. Various unit internal physical fitness program's were launched e.g. Tug of War, the Dippenaars Marathon (a relay race from Omuthiya to Tsumeb), Bundlesport, sub-sub unit fitness competitions etc.

### Omuthiya Tug Of War Trials - 4 March



















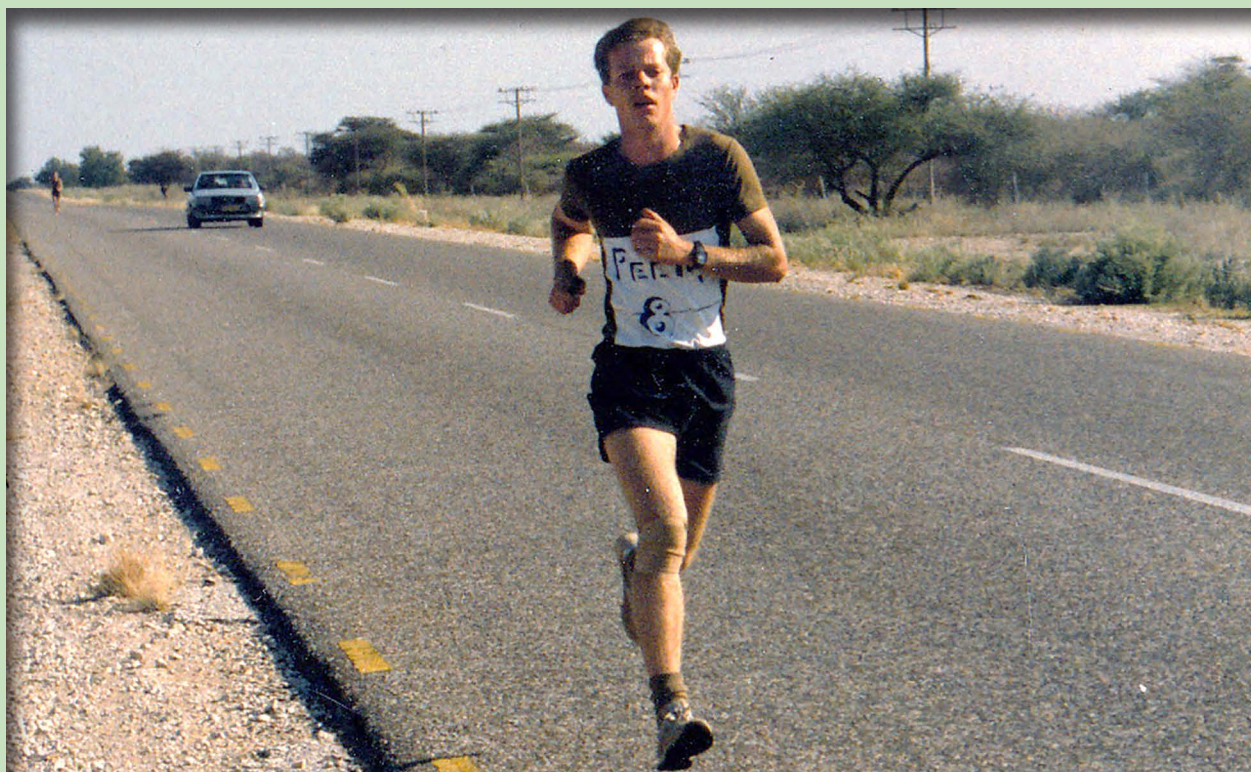




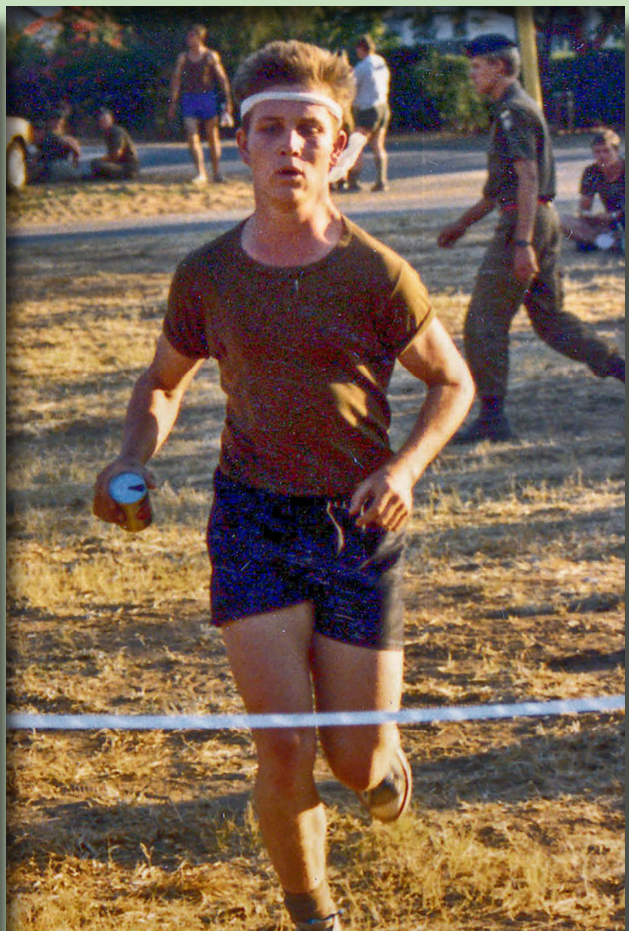
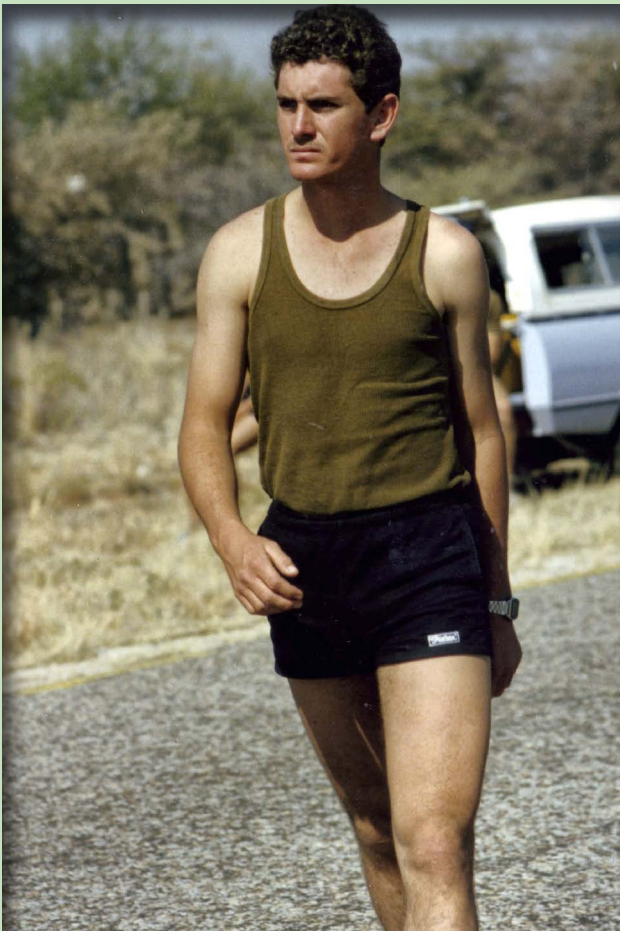




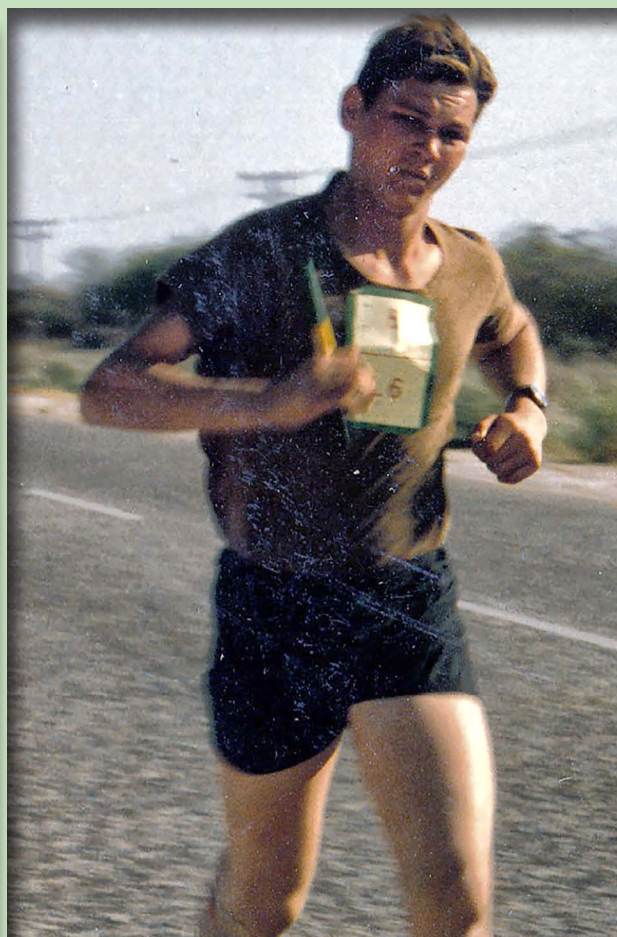
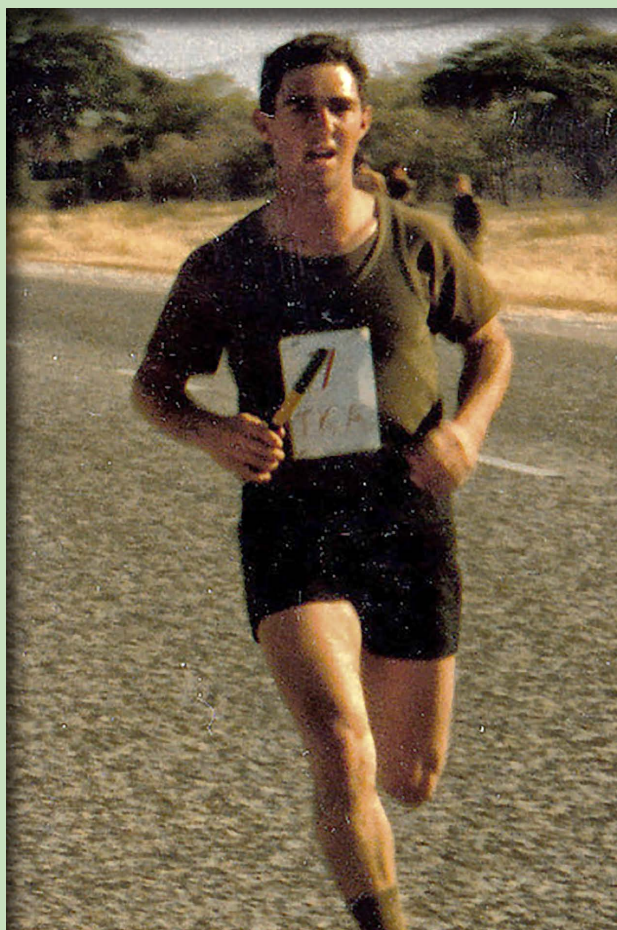
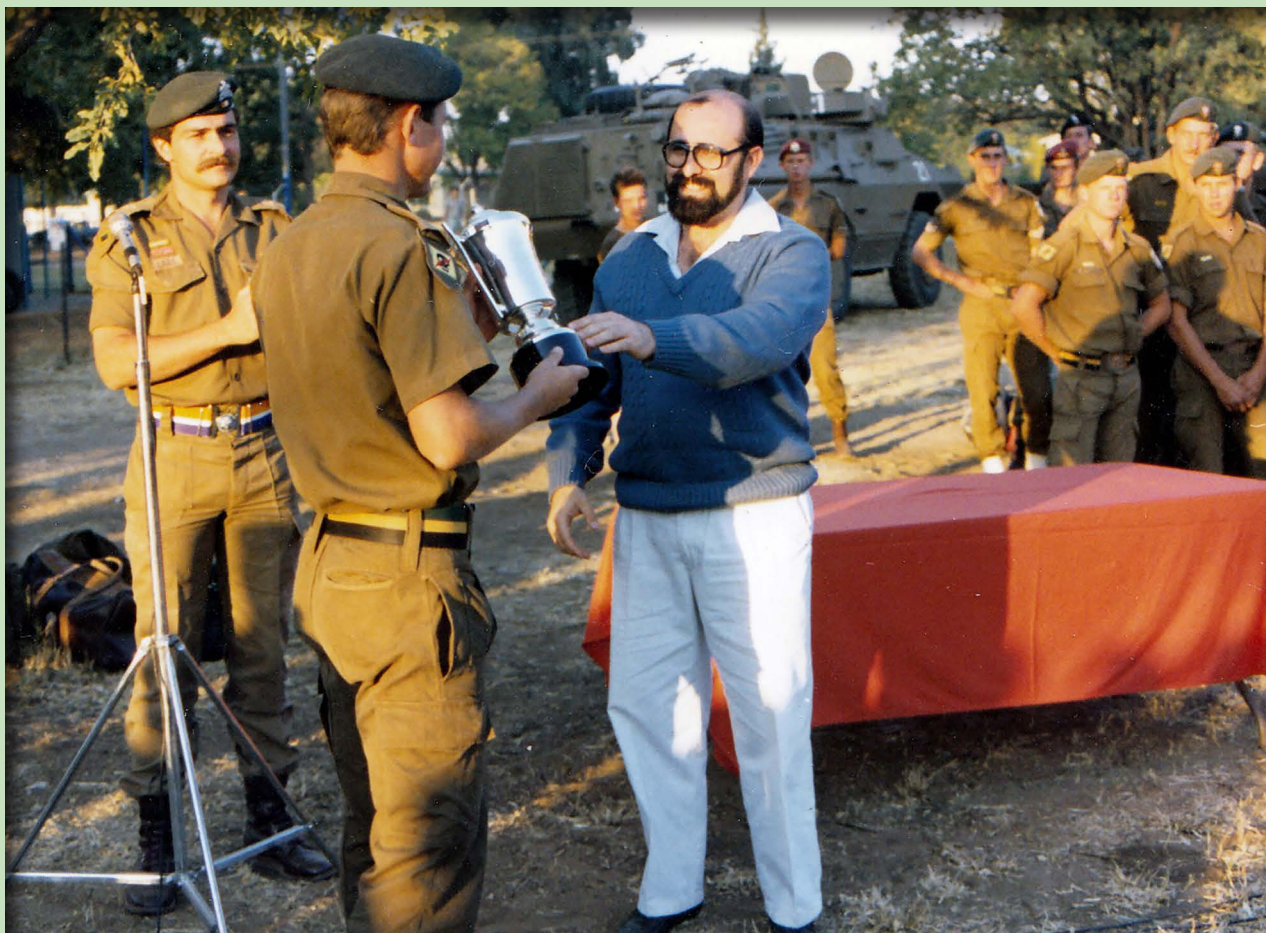
## Dippenaars Marathon 26 March



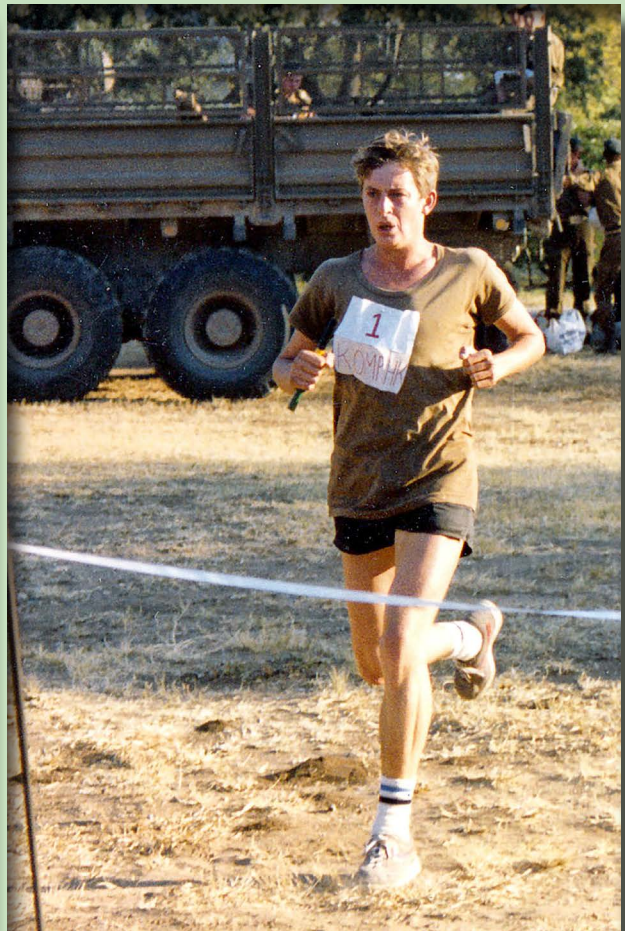
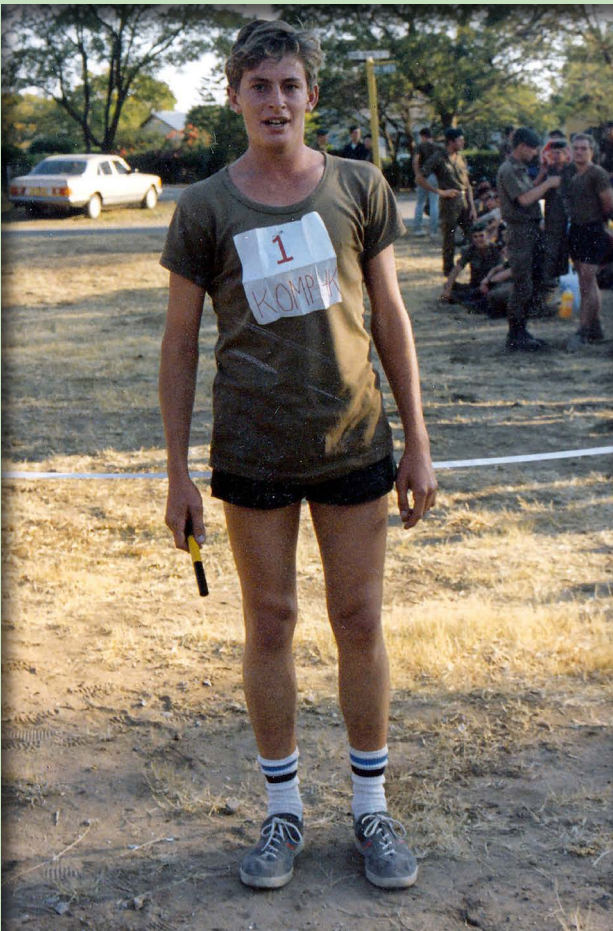




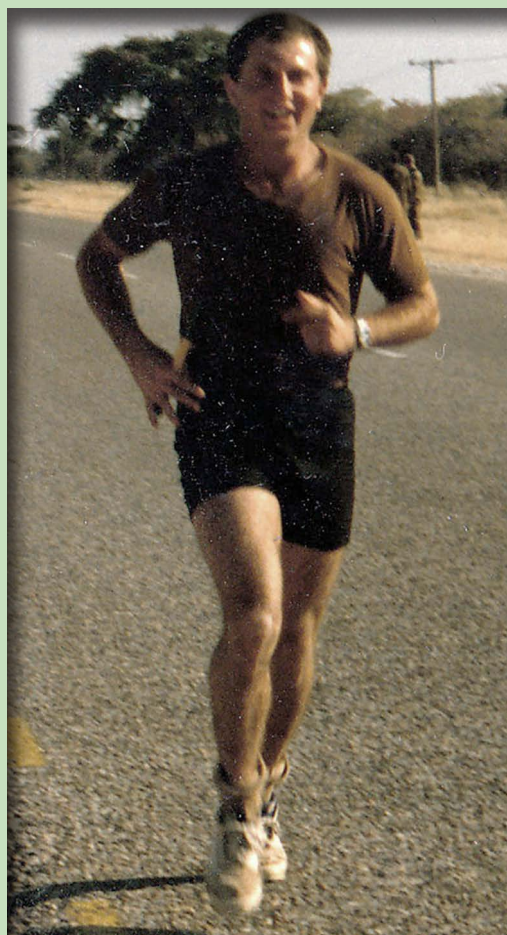
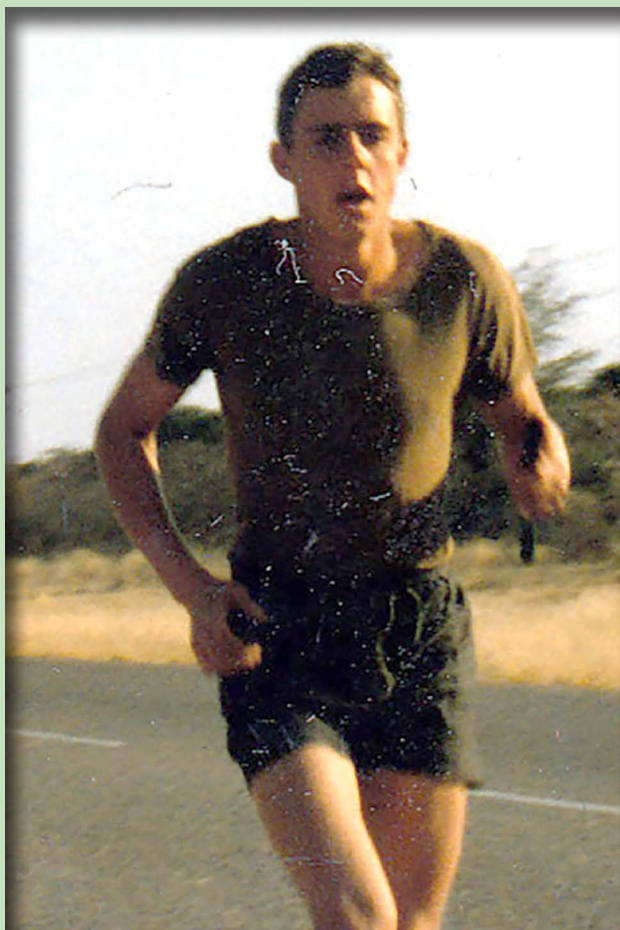




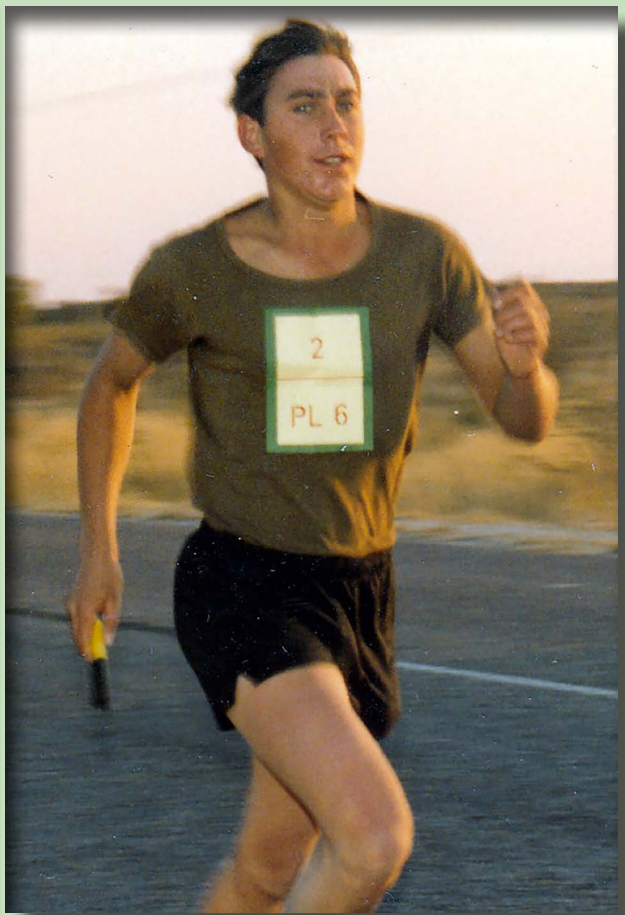
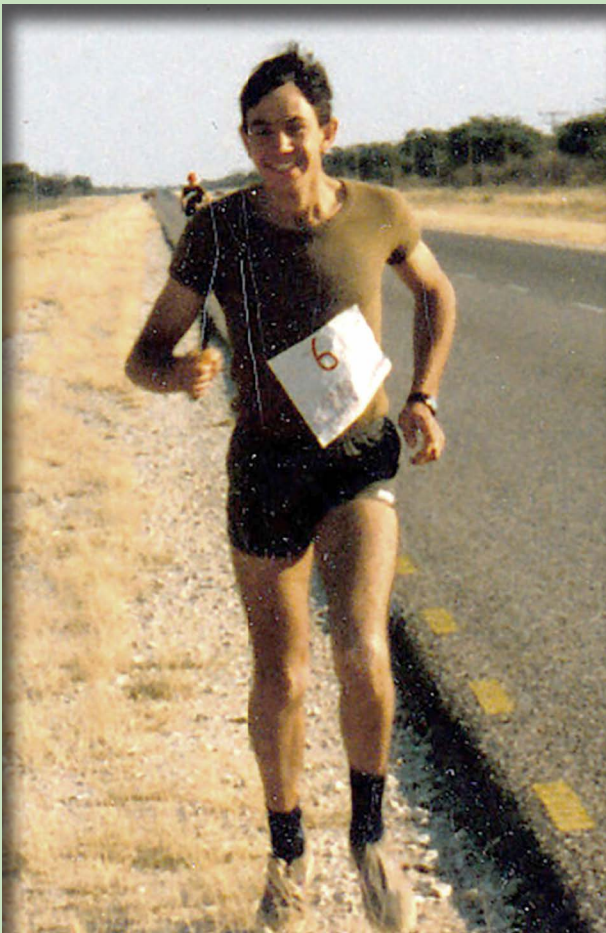








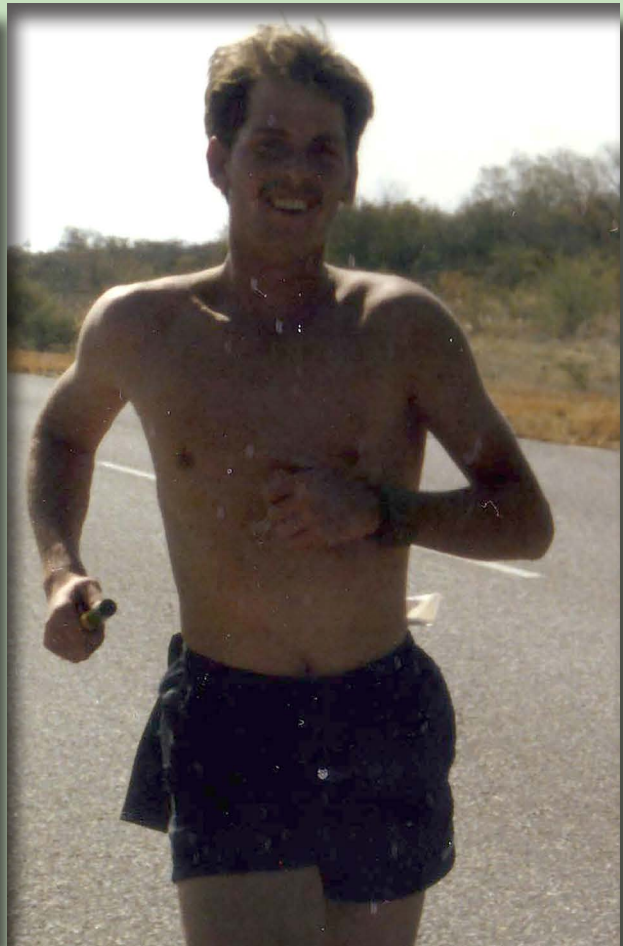
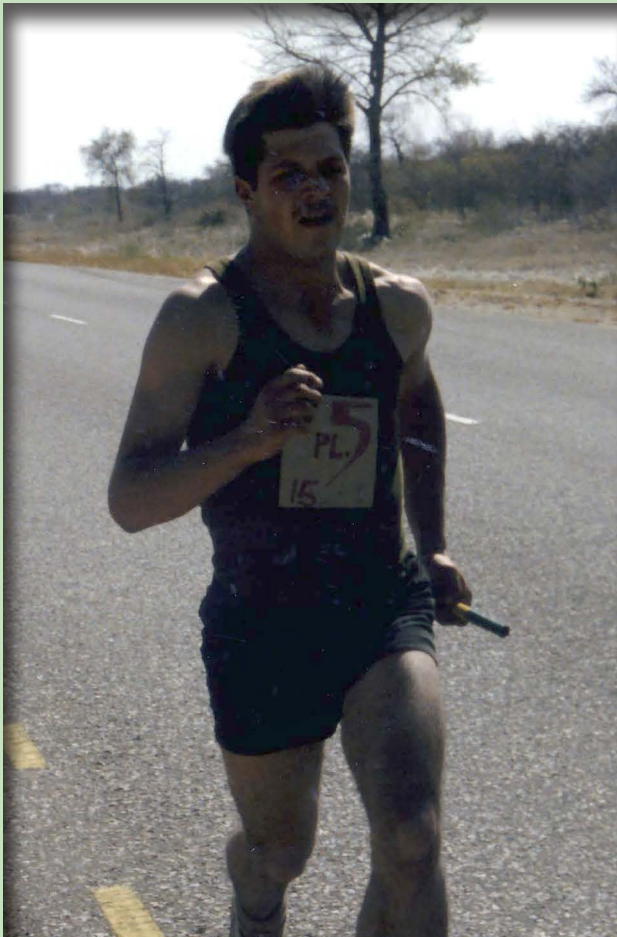




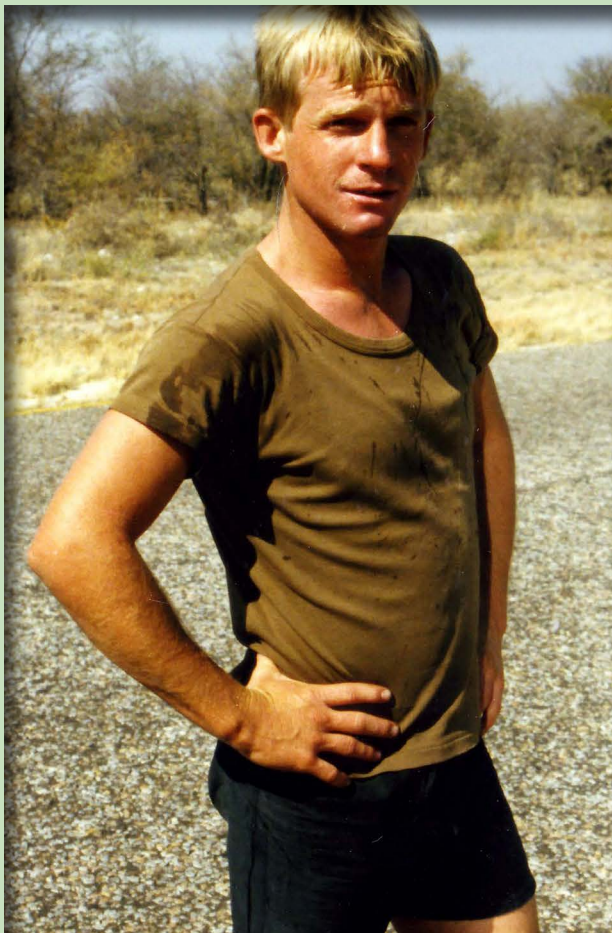




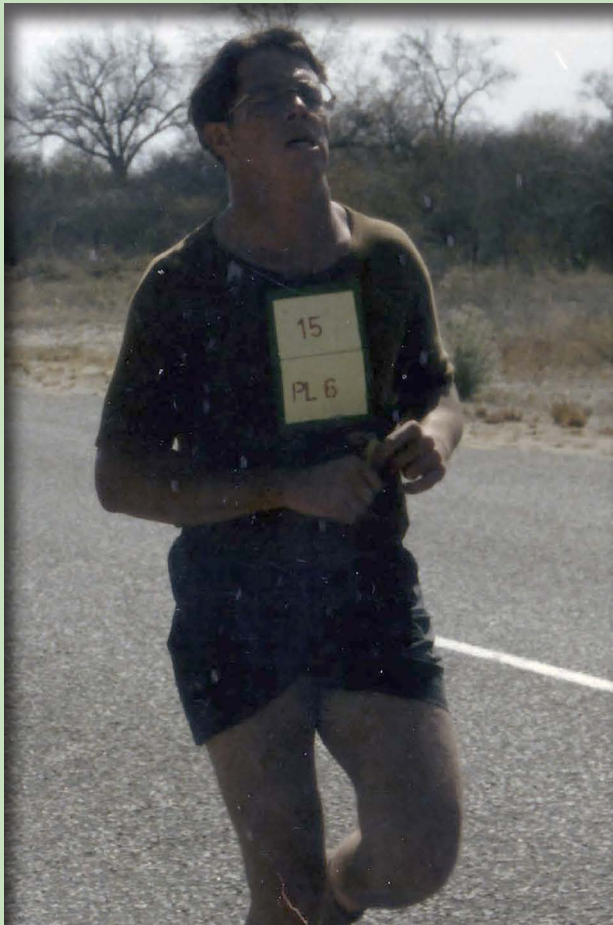












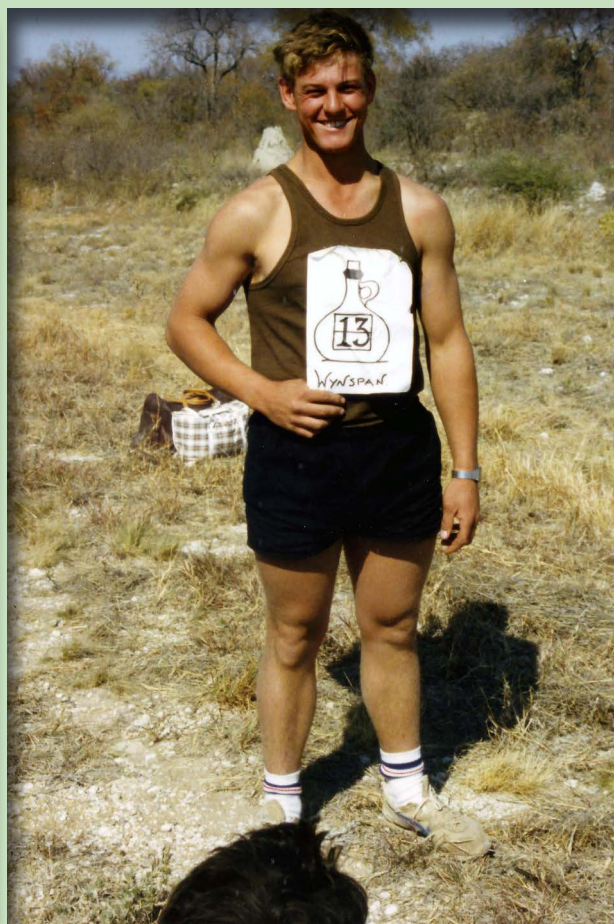




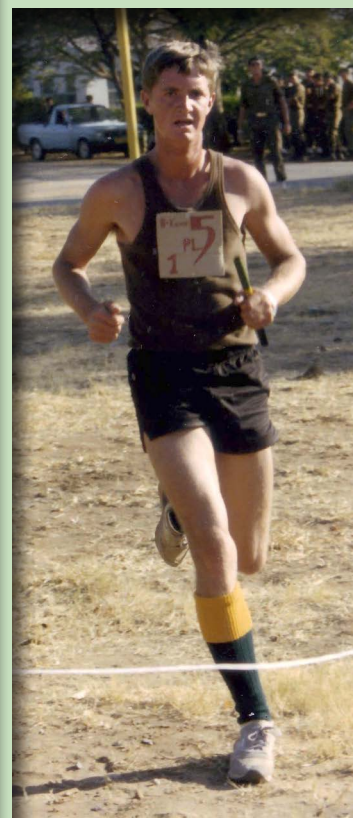
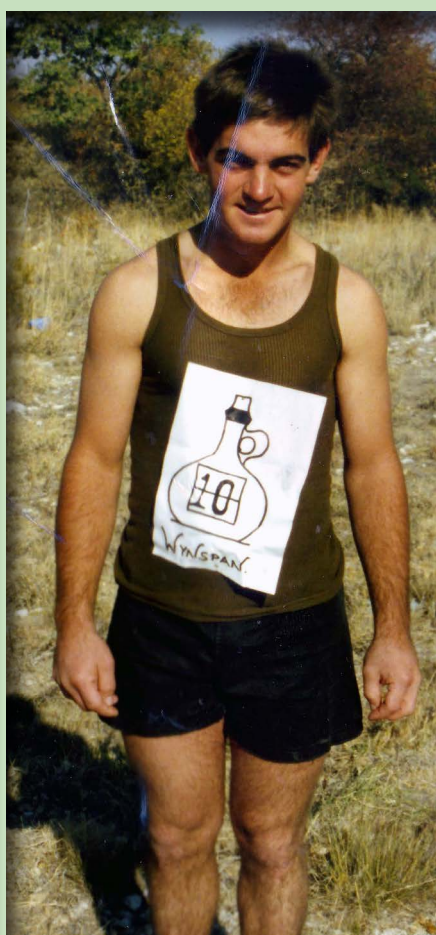




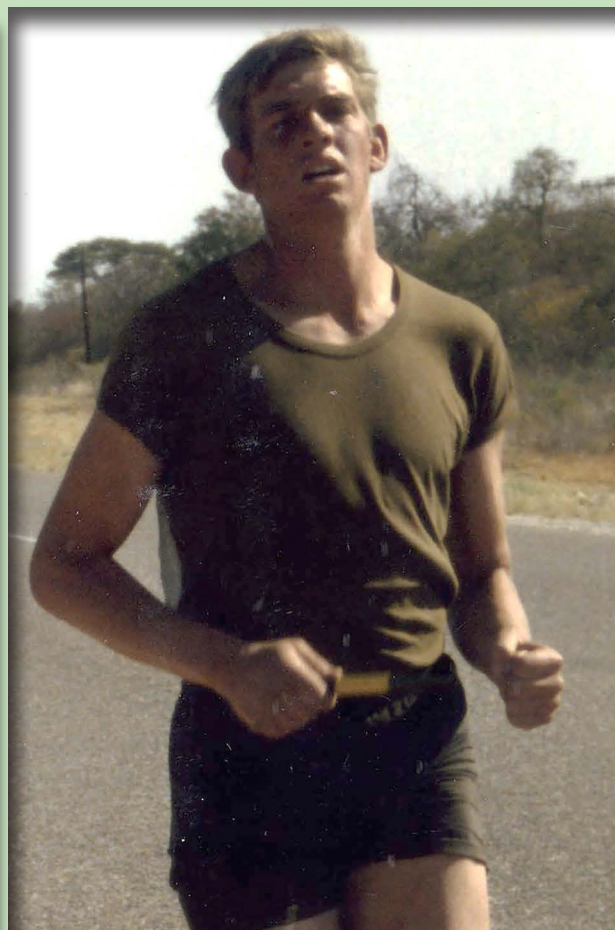
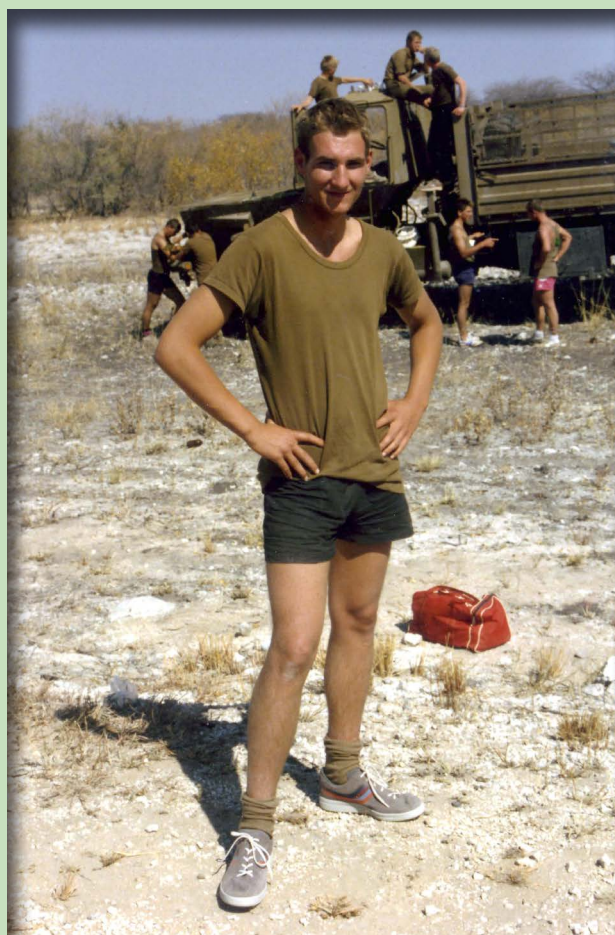














## Chief of the Army Fitness Evaluation



*Chief of the Army Fitness Evaluation: There was also the Head of the Army Fitness Evaluation that involved a 25km route march with backpack and rifle. This was done on the white calcrete road to Tsintsabis. Everyone had to do it, even the company commander. Only 10km was required for those over 30 years of age. Being just over 30 it therefore provided me with the opportunity to finish a bit early. The time was used to verify the preparations at the finish line. I could also drive back on the route to encourage the men – using marching music and verbal motivation. We had a fire at the finish line with something on the coals but, as usual, the men were so tired that they did not eat much.*

*I ensured that there was a beer for the first lot but can't remember if the stragglers also got some. I do remember lots of blisters on feet though and the medic was ready with his syringe - replacing the fluid in a blister with Methyolite. It worked wonders.*











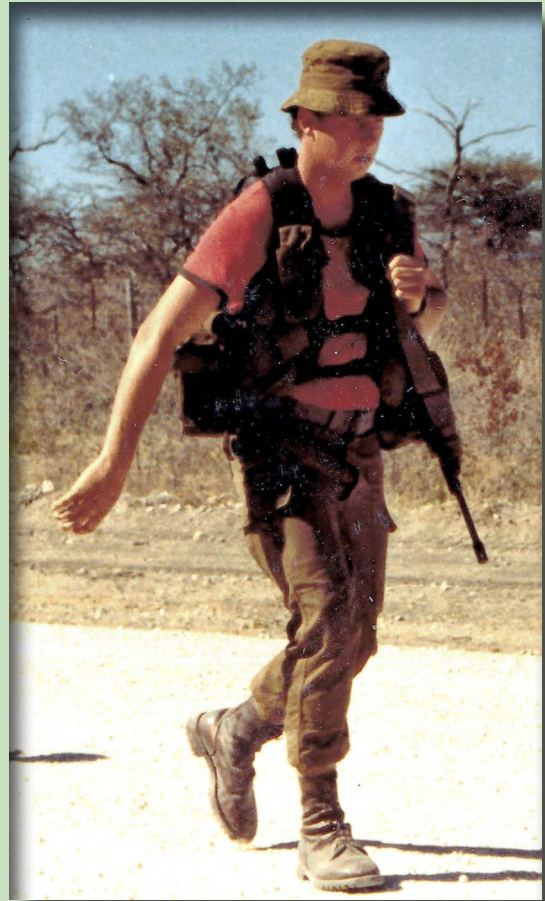












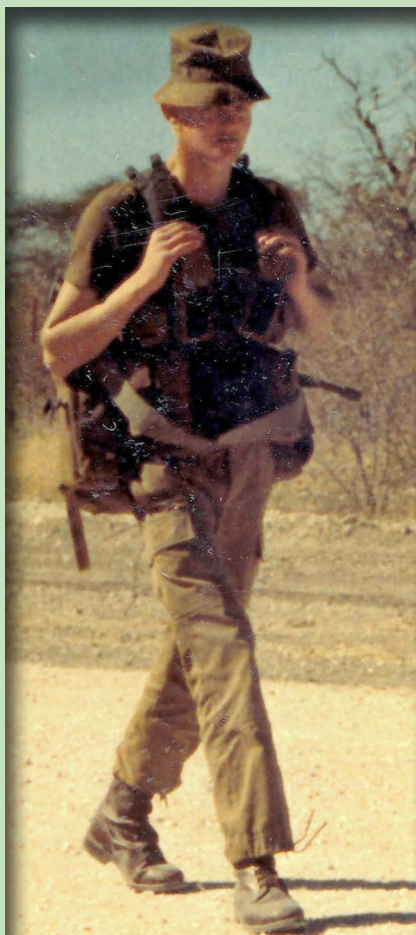
















































*Jaco Swanevelder recalls: "I walked the 25km together with Johan Kooij. I had to give 3 steps to every one of his to keep up! At a stage, around the 15km mark, my army issue jockstrap started chafing me so badly that I just tore it off my body and threw it in the bushes! The hike made a lot of guys end up in the sickbay for the feared Methyolite treatment for blisters. I think the Medics derived some sadistic pleasure from this procedure!"*





## Team Building

































































## Bundelsport









## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. But all play and no work makes him something worse.

### Barbeques

























## Staff Members Potjie



On New Year's Eve the leader group had a potjiekos (literally "small pot food", where a whole meal is cooked in one cast iron pot) competition in the East Base while the troops held a barbeque. Two separate potjies were cooked and it soon turned out as a competition between the NCO's and the officers. On taste the NCO's won the competition but due to foal play when they sneaked a few onion peels into the officer's pot, the judge Maj Flip van Wyk declared both teams' winners and losers.





## Leadergroup teambuild at TCL club









## Hastati Munch



The Hastati Munch was part of the Bravo Roman tradition.





The Hastati is defined as follows: “Hastati (singular: Hastatus) were a class of infantry in the armies of the early Roman Republic who originally fought as spearmen and later as swordsmen”. The meal had to be eaten with the fingers, without any utensils, and wine was the only beverage. The guests-of-honour was the 61 Mech Bn HQ staff. Dress code included orange tablecloths as draped uniforms for the officers and brown bed sheets for other ranks.

Laurel wreaths were made from the twigs of local Mopani trees. Cmdt Smit took up his place at the entrance of the mess hall as main Centurion and all “guests” then had to come and greet him.

His words would be: “Lend me thine ears”, and he would then touch the guest’s ear. It only worked for the first ten guests or so and then he just let them flock in. The meal was opened with the marching in of the Bravo Coy banner followed by singing of the Hastati song. Then only could the feast begin in all earnest.

Too much wine makes any Roman riotous and it wasn’t long before the men started a food fight. The feast however continued till much later. Cleaning up the next morning was a challenge on its own!

#### THE SONG OF THE HASTATI

Ons is dapper helde  
(We are brave heroes)  
Vol oorwinningskrag  
(Full of conquering power)  
Volg steeds in die spore  
(Still following the footsteps)  
Van die vyandsmag  
(Of the enemy force)  
Om hul te vernietig  
(To destroy them)  
Waar hul mag vernag  
(Where they might stay overnight)  
Ons is glad nie bang nie  
(We are not afraid)  
Steeds vol heldemoed  
(Still full of hero’s courage)  
Voorwaarts is die roepstem van die Ha-sta-ti  
(Forwards is the call of the Ha-sta-ti)  
Ons sal veg vir jou Suid Afrika (2X)  
(We will fight for you South Africa (2x))

#### THE SONG OF THE MECHANISED INFANTRY (Tune - “Das Panzerlied”)

In storm of sneeu of die bakkende son,  
(In storm or snow or baking sun,) in gloeiende dae of in yskoue nag.  
(in glowing days or ice cold night.)  
Vol stof in ons gesigte  
(Full of dust in our faces)  
Tog hoog in onse gees - ja gees (2x)  
(Still high in our spirit – yes spirit (2x))  
Dit stu onse Ratels na voor onbevrees.  
(It propels our Ratels forward without fear)  
Met Ratels, soldate, ’n toonbeeld van krag.  
(With Ratels, soldiers, a paragon of power)  
Hou ons al die eer van die Weermag in pag.  
(We keep all the honour of the Army in trust.)  
Vir Land en Volk en Vaderland,  
(For Country and Nation and Fatherland,) Is ons die Ratel Meg - ja Meg (2x)  
(We are the Ratel Mech - yes Mech (2x))  
En vir ons eer sal ons altyd bly veg.  
(And we will always fight for our honour.)





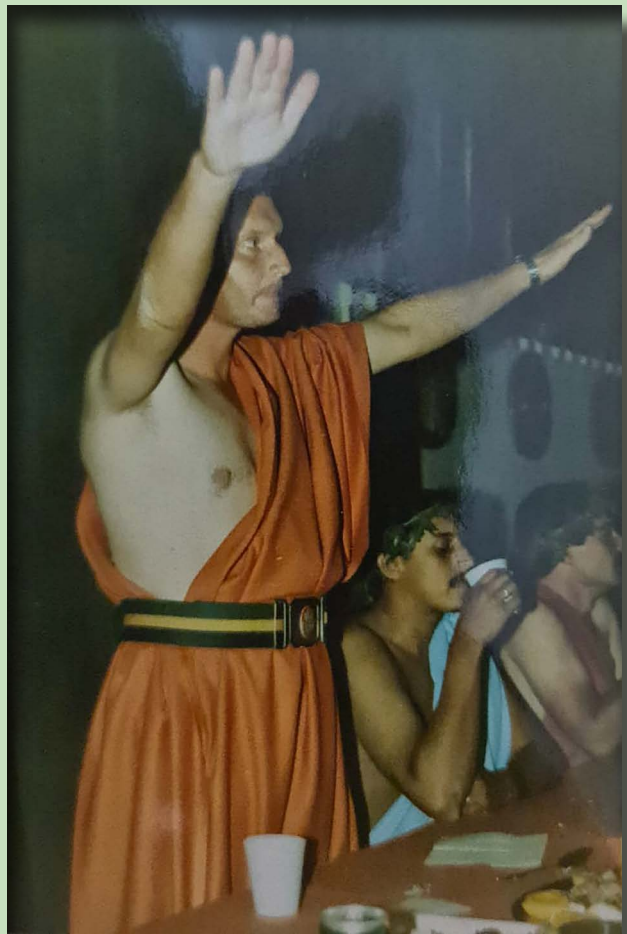








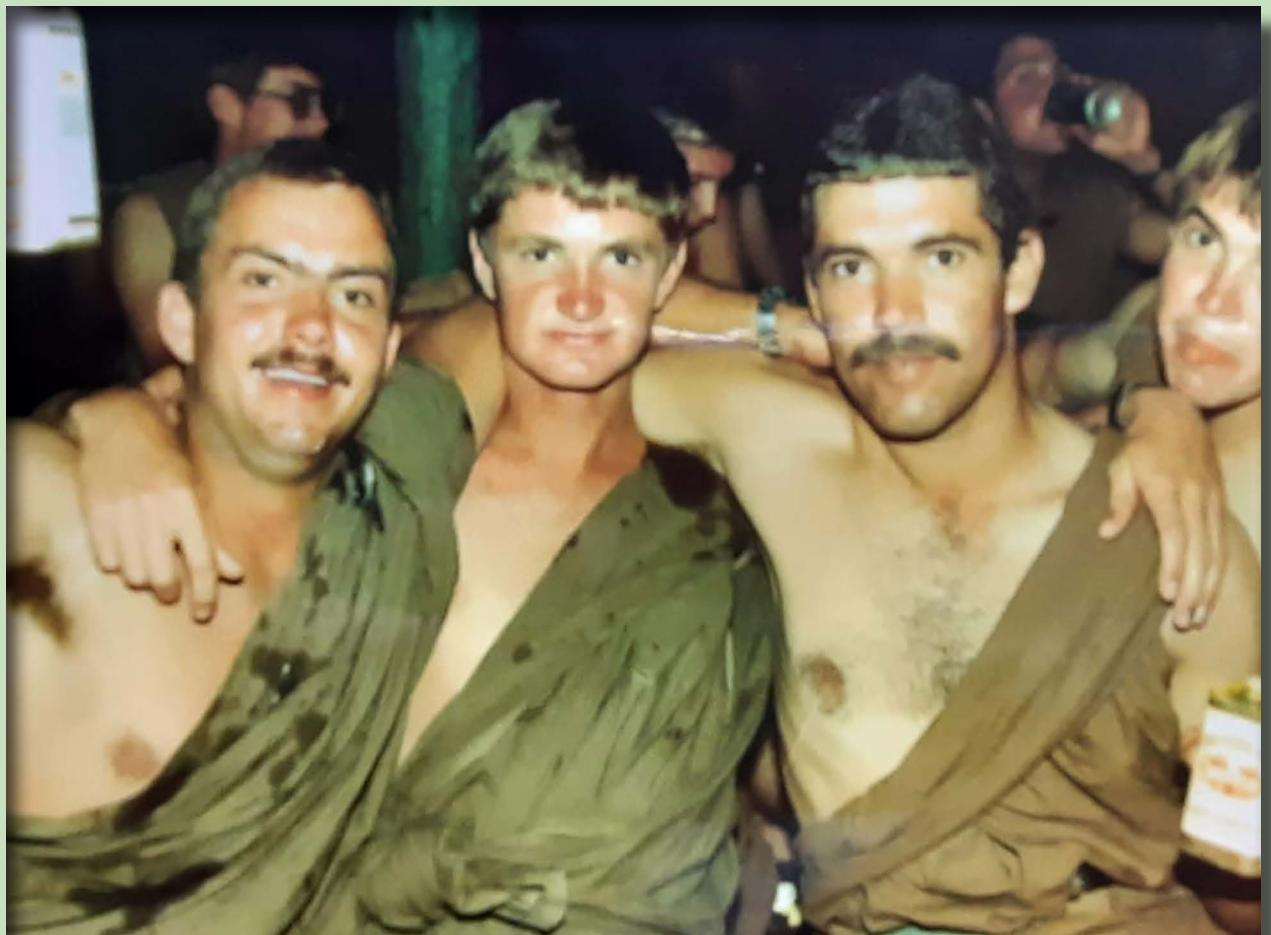




















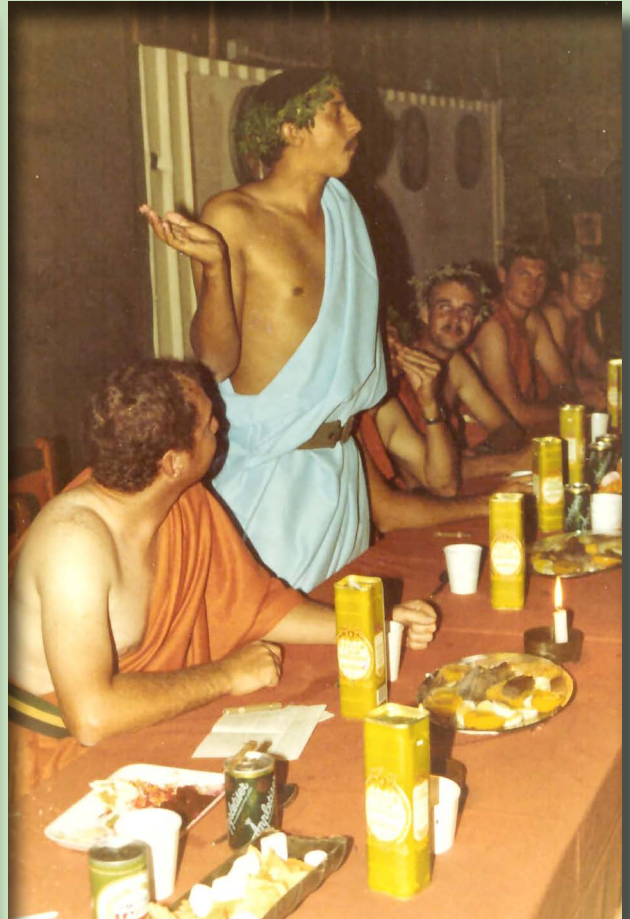
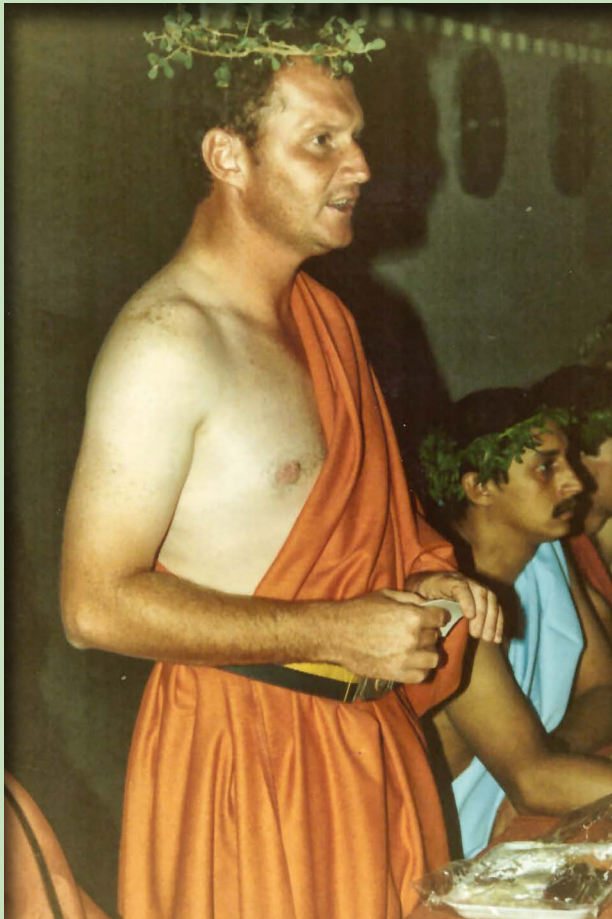














## Officers Teambuilding Namatonie























### Officers Teambuilding Gross Barmen













## Visit to the Hoba meteorite (60 ton) 18 February









## Visit to Lake Otshikoto









## Minor Games Competition - 8 June





## PRE-MODULAR DEPLOYMENTS



**About our six deployments south of the Angola border until 1 September**

The unit was located in the area of Sector 10 with its territorial forces, but 61 was a conventional force who reported direct to Chief of the Army. Since there were no conventional deployment instructions until August, the unit could be utilised for other internal operations. Those deployments also served as a show-of-force to the local population and the enemy operating in and south of the Angolan border.

The need for 61 Mech assistance was communicated to the OC (Cmdt Smit) of the unit. He and his staff personnel would assess the implications on the combat readiness to send some sub units for the conventional readiness of 61 Mech. He would then make an appreciation of the needs and decided on the compilation of the force strength to be deployed. Mostly it was the whole sub-unit with its echelon to enable 61 Mech to consolidate should a more demanding situation appear.

For example; The anti-tank platoon did not deploy on the first communication operation (Com Ops) to the Ombalatu/ Ogongo area (20 February to 3 March).

During riots in Tsumeb (29 - to 30 April) only two Ratel 20 platoons deployed.

For all other deployments, Bravo deployed as a composite combat team (3 x 20mm Platoons and 2 x Ratel 90 groups (22 Ratels - V esh) HQ (3 x Ratel command), Medic vehicle variant (x 1) and its A1 ech (8 - 10 vehicles).



**This section of the Bravo Journal deals with the following deployments:**

**20 February to 3 March - Ombalantu and Onesi / Tsandi.**

**6 to 16 March - Ombalantu and Ruacana.**

**29 to 30 April - Platoon 4 and 5 to Tsumeb for dealing with riots.**

**5 to 14 July - Ogongo.**

**30 July to 8 August - Ondangwa and Oshikango.**

**11 to 18 August - Bittersoet. (Pre-phase for Op Modular).**

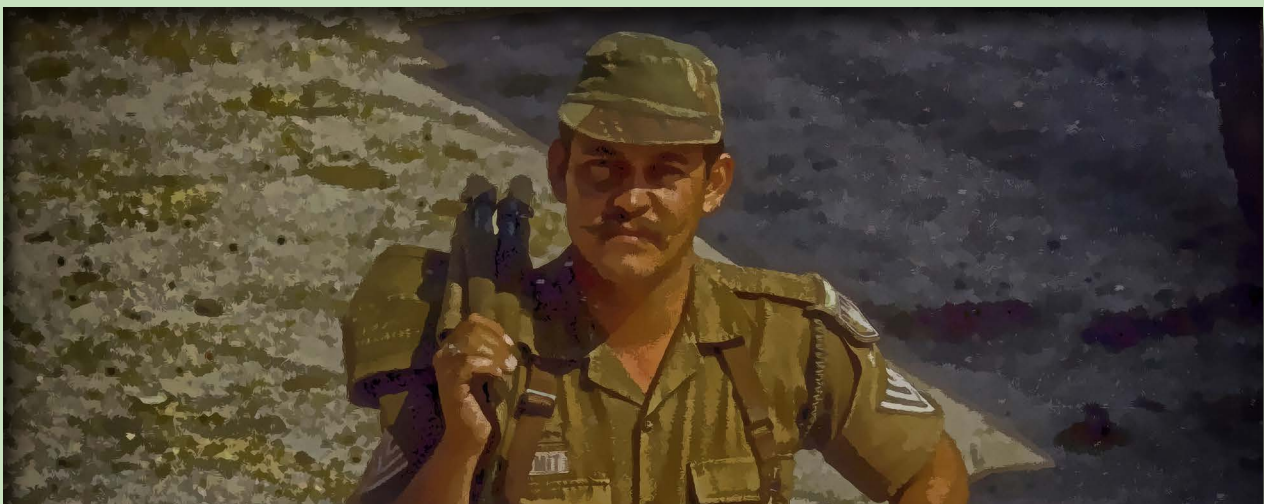


## Procedures for Deploying to Various Areas in Ovamboland

**1. Request:** 61 Mech commander received a request for assistance. Issued a Warning Orders to the chosen sub-unit commander. Warning orders were then issued to the platoons and subsequently to the sub-sub units (platoons, anti-tank and A1 echelon).



**2. Preparation:** Since 61 Mech was at stand-by on short notice, the members and vehicles were always ready. Rations were issued to the members and bulk rations to the A1 Echelon.





**3. Movement orders: Non-tactical movement was the function of the Bravo Second in Command. This implied; sequence of the convoy, speed, size of the packets, breakdown and recovery procedures, reporting channels, emergency drills - thus every aspect of large convoy movements on public roads and off-road.**



**4. Liaison: If necessary, the combat team commander departed ahead of the convoy and receive an intelligence briefing from the SADF military base in the deployment area and the laager space for the combat team.**





**5. Arrival:** Established a field HQ (more static with a tactical map in a tent) or keep the HQ mobile. Developed a deployment plan. Allocate areas to sub-sub units or combine elements.

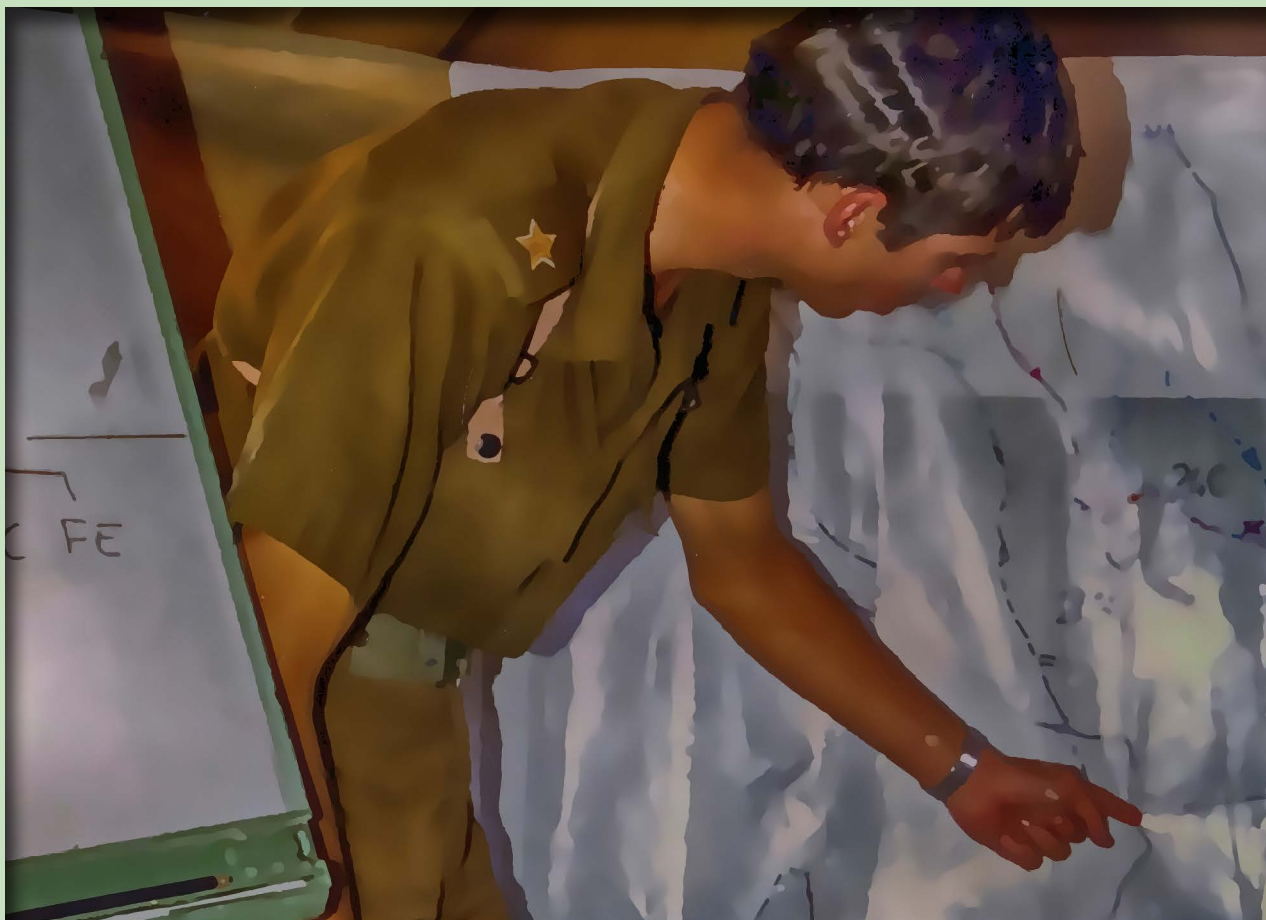


**6. Execution:** Deploy according to the plan.





**7. Adapting: Revised the plan regular as the demand in/decreased.**

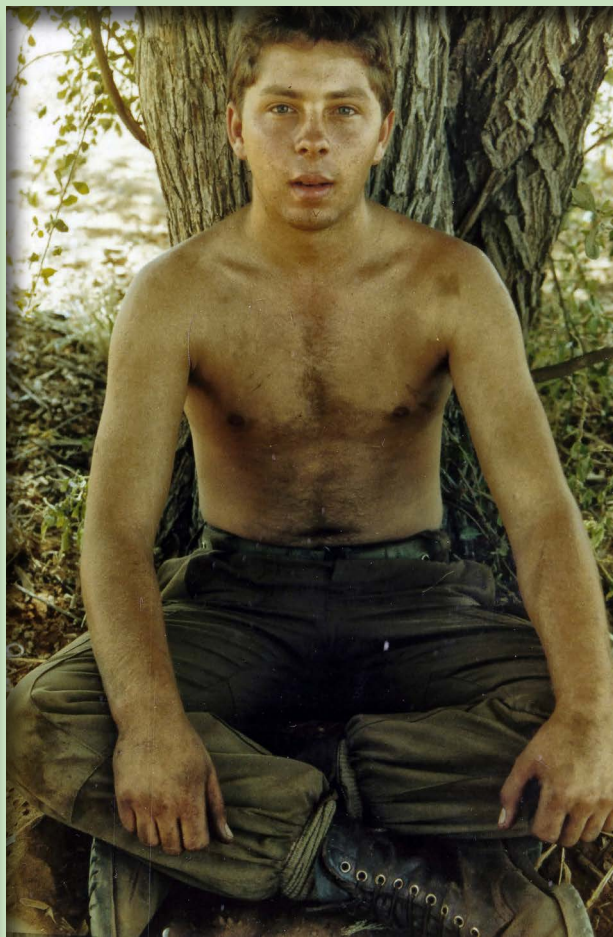


**8. Roundup: Finalise all administration and reports and hand it in to Sector 10 HQ.**





**9. Return: Movement back to Omuthiya. Demobilisation. Clean and replace consumed items.**





## 20 February to 3 March - Ombalantu and Ondangwa.



On 20 February Bravo (minus A Tk) deployed to the Ombalantu area. This was our first deployment. At midday on 26 February 1987 Bravo Coy formed a separate, closed laager, about 200m outside a base of 101 Bn. The base was surrounded by soil embankments and less than 100m from a Koevoet base.

Capt Ben Venter was the company commander of the 101 Bn company. During my liaison visit to the base there was a palpable feeling of unease. I deduced that the CSM insulted some of his Ovambo troops. It was their matter and Bravo Coy continued with replenishments and its late afternoon routine. Fernando Almeida was busy preparing a chicken for my 30th birthday at my Ratel. The next moment all hell broke loose in the company base. Shots were fired at us from the base and the Bravo diesel bunker received a few glancing shots. The Koe-voet base also started firing in all directions.

Fernando responded swiftly. He pushed me over where I sat on my camping chair and dived in to physically cover me, weapon at the ready. I immediately inquired about Ben Venter on the radio. I had to call repeatedly before he replied. When he ultimately responded his message was: "I think you need to rather move further away from the base." I gave the necessary instructions to Bravo Coy. When we were ready to move, I informed Ben and could hear exited voices in the background.

His words were: "Do not withdraw; my troops are busy kicking down the door to the command bunker." I was surprised and confused, and asked him to repeat the message. He confirmed that his troops were planning to throw hand grenades through the shooting tower of the bunker. I moved immediately and entered the base with a platoon. Ovambo soldiers fled in all directions over the embankments. Fernando entered the bunker and unfortunately disarmed the wrong person (Ben Venter)! The situation was brought under control and we occupied the base.

Cmdt Willie Welgemoed of 101 Bn was already on his way from Ondangwa and I think he arrived around 23:00. It would have been an embarrassment for any commander when another unit had to intervene to restore discipline in one of his bases. There was also the question of the escaped Ovambo troops – it did not sit well with them that Ratels occupied their base! Cmdt Welgemoed requested me to withdraw from the base and we did so the same night. We redeployed to Onesi and Tsandi until 3 March.









*John McCrum recalls: “During one patrol some of us were invited into the Cuka shop for traditional beer. We sat on the floor of the hut with several locals, after handing over a couple of Rand, large clay pots of beer were passed around. I don’t know how long we were in there but by the time we crawled out the 2Lt van Wyk and the Ratels were on their way to pick us up. Wessie (David vd Westhuizen) threw up just as we were getting ready to mount up but he had to jump out when he realized he’s lost his two false teeth when he threw up so we had to wait while he scratched in the dirt and vomit for his teeth! We were surprised & shit scared when the Major showed up and took some pictures so we had to act as sober as possible”.*





## 6 to 14 March - Ombalantu



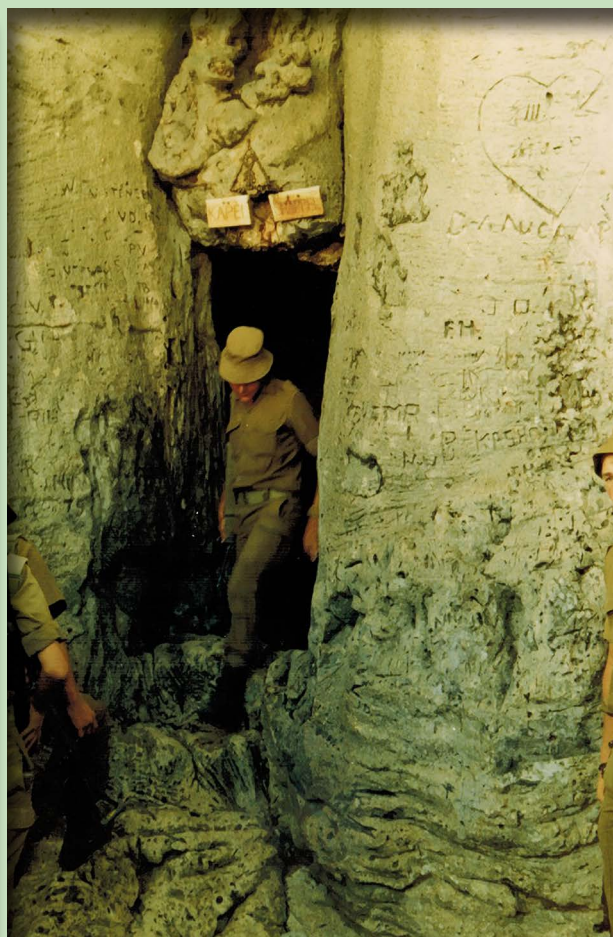
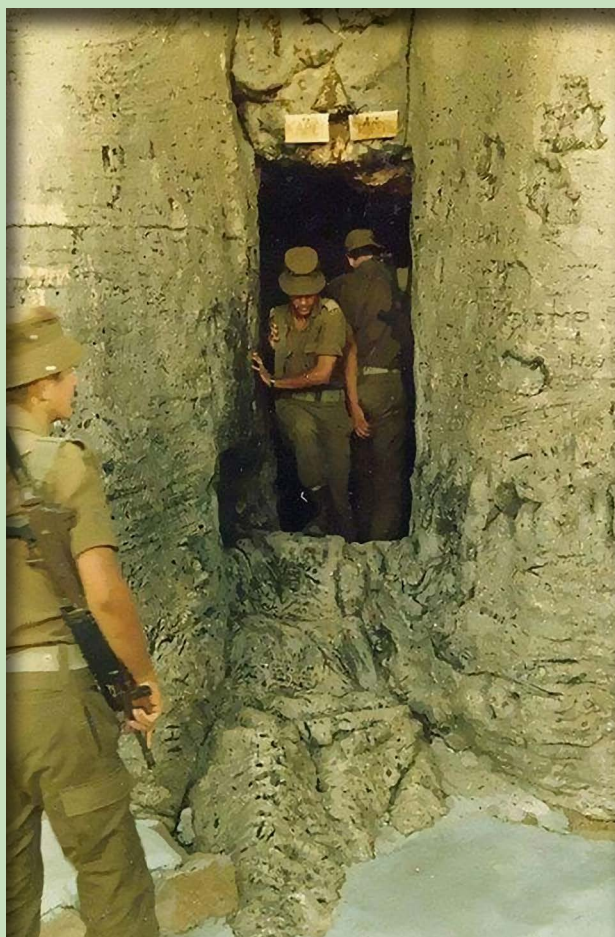
The complete Bravo deployed to Ombalantu between 6 to 13 March.

The interesting thing about this base was that it had an enormous baobab tree with a small chapel in its trunk. It had space for a small pulpit and seating for seven.

We thoroughly searched through the area and detected various signs of SWAPO activity. The majority of those around Onesi, which was a known SWAPO infiltration route.















































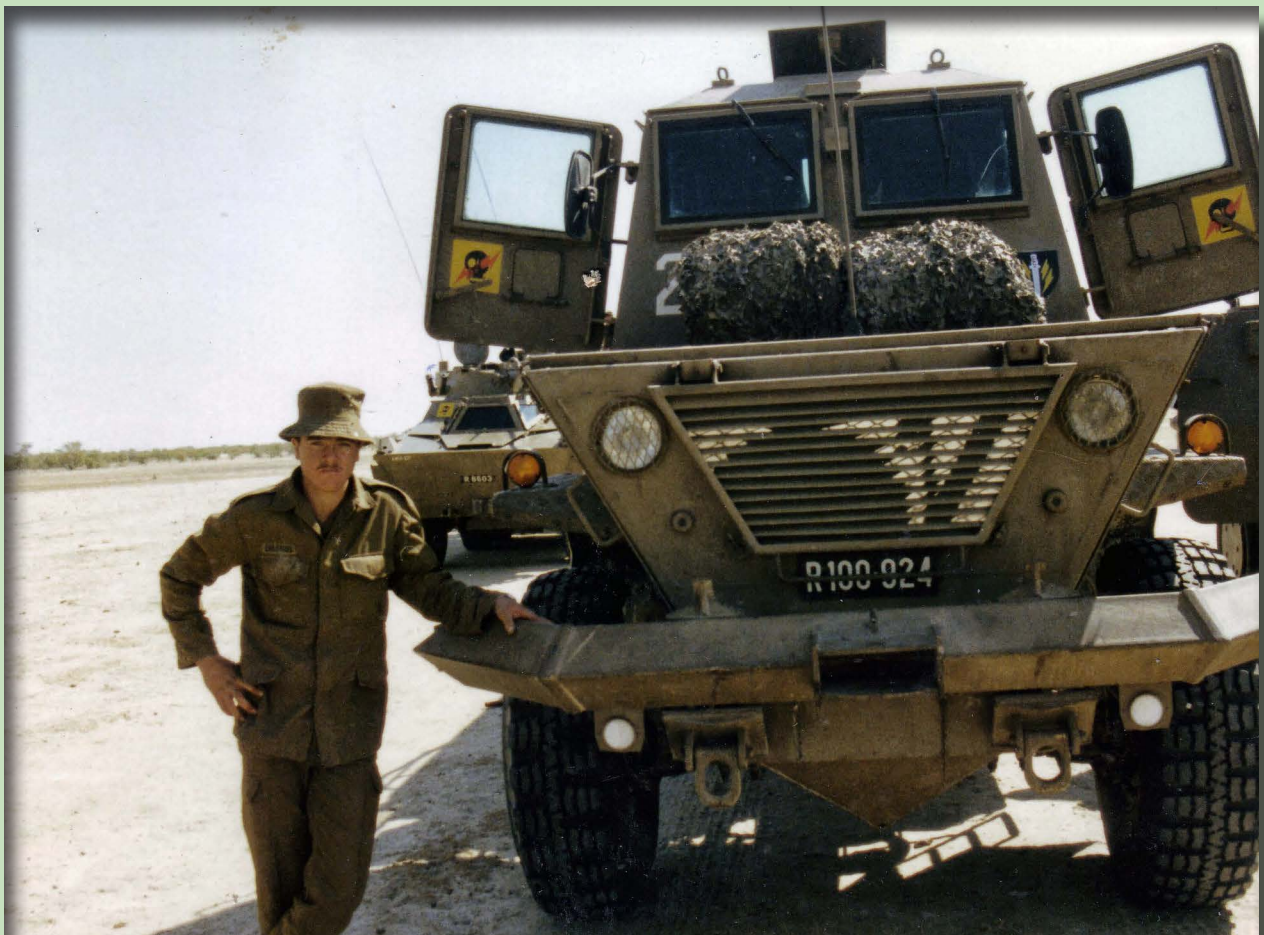




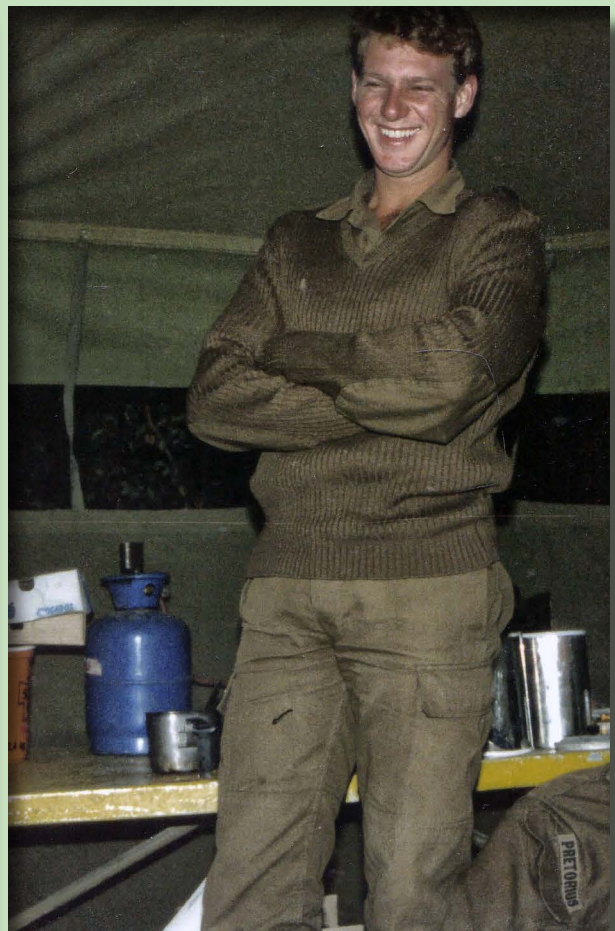








































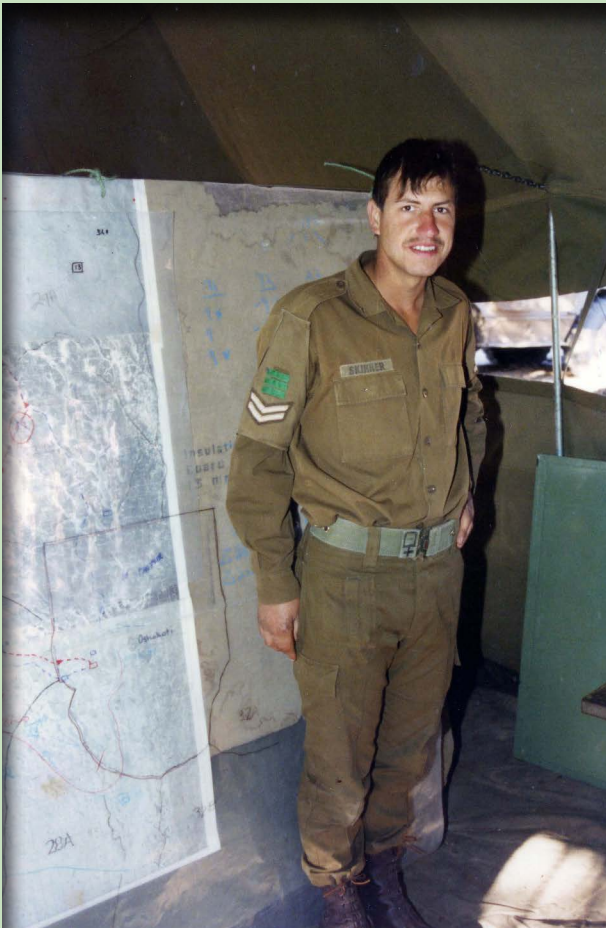
































### Cone of a Termitarium

Safe in our closed leaguer we stand  
Chatting about the past day's events  
Soft as a mattress the Ovambo sand  
In our sleeping bags lined up like tents

Another day spared from grief  
Thankful – together we share relief

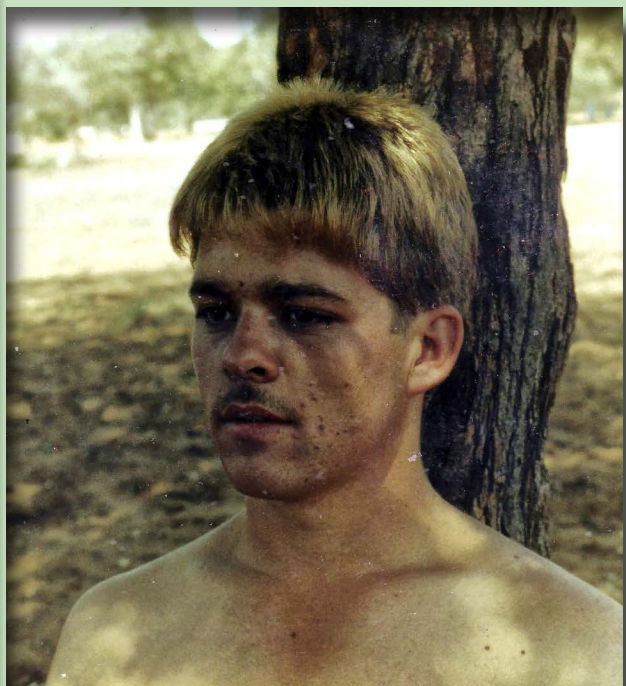
Our senses wane  
As if inwardly lame  
Thoughts start to creep  
From slumber to sleep

Here and there a snore is heard  
Dreams all southward faced  
In the blanket of silence embraced  
As the moon's light gradually disappeared

Ten men – in spirit together bound  
To stand together in hope  
Of what tomorrow will be found  
Where our entwined fates will lope  
Like the tip of a conical ant hill of sand  
Exposed to mercy and grace we stand

© Dawid Lotter

Revised in English by Genl Tony Savides





























































## 14 to 16 March - Ruacana



Our visit to 51 Bn at Ruacana was meant as a show-of-force operation.

Ruacana was a little town that primarily housed government officials and SWAWEK (South West Africa Water and Electricity Corporation). Ruacana developed due to the presence of a large underground hydro-electrical plant. This plant was connected to a nearby dam across the border in Angola at Calueque. 51 Bn was assigned as protection unit for this project.

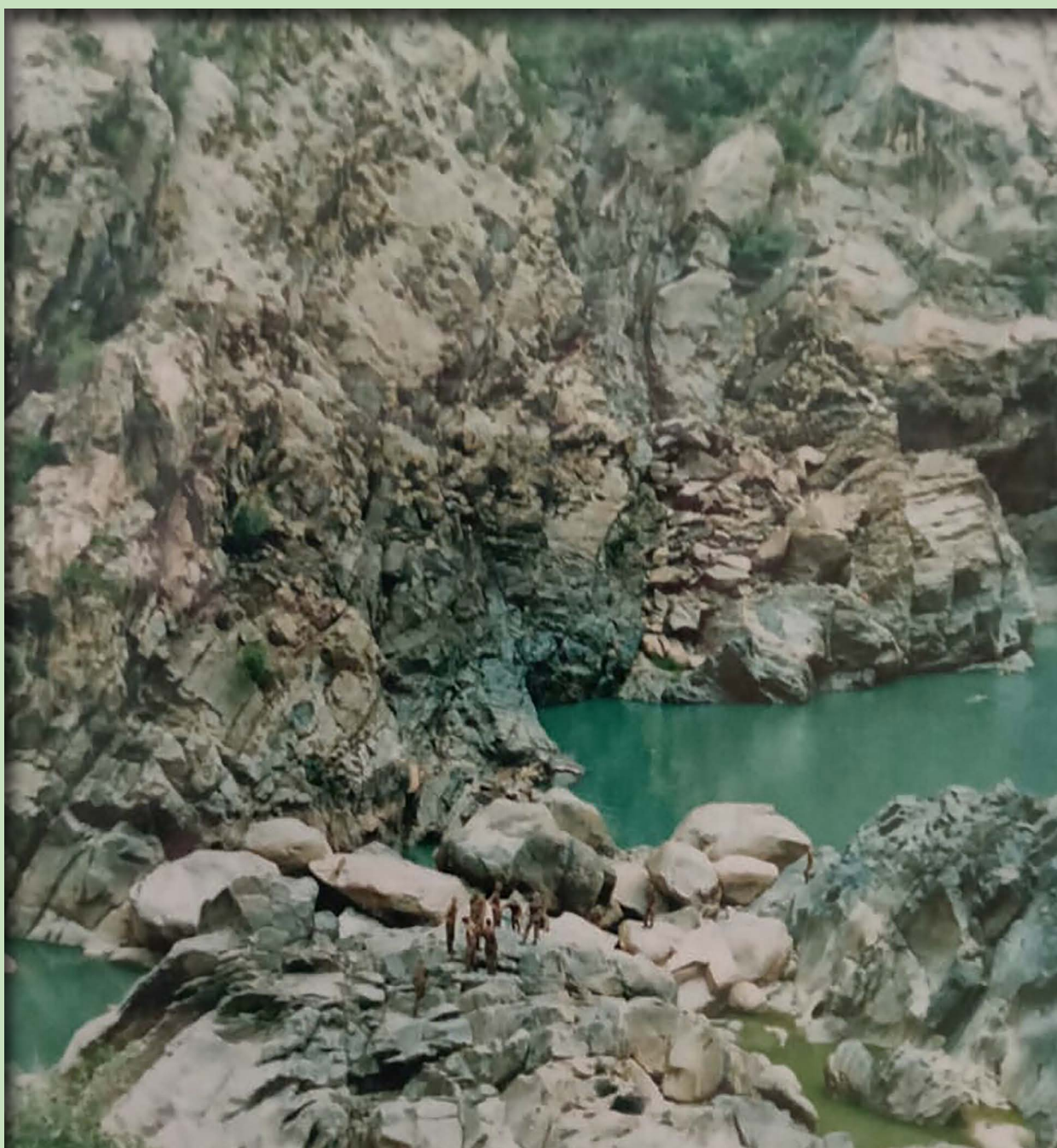




**It was a short deployment with a dual purpose. Firstly, we had to make the inhabitants feel more comfortable about their safety and secondly to show the Angolans that we were there to protect our interests.**

**In 1986 the whole of Bravo Coy drove down into the power station. Going down the 800m tunnel was one of the highlights of our visit, even though turning around with the vehicles brought some challenges of its own. Unfortunately, I could not get similar permission for Bravo Coy 1987. The men could however walk in and view the underground plant.**

**Unfortunately, the Ruacana falls, unlike the case with Bravo Coy 86, were bone dry. We had a barbeque and returned back to 61 Mech Bn Gp.**



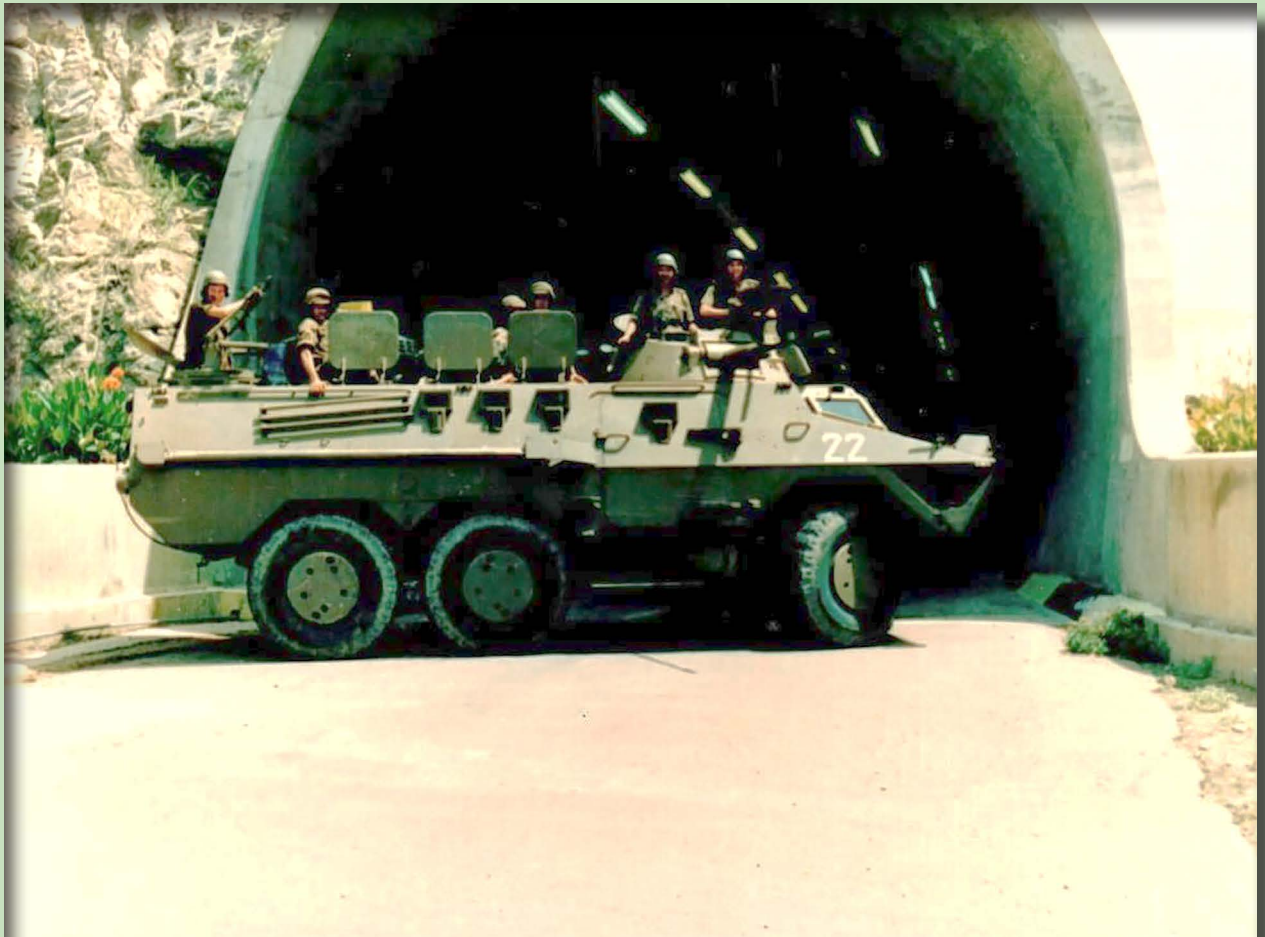












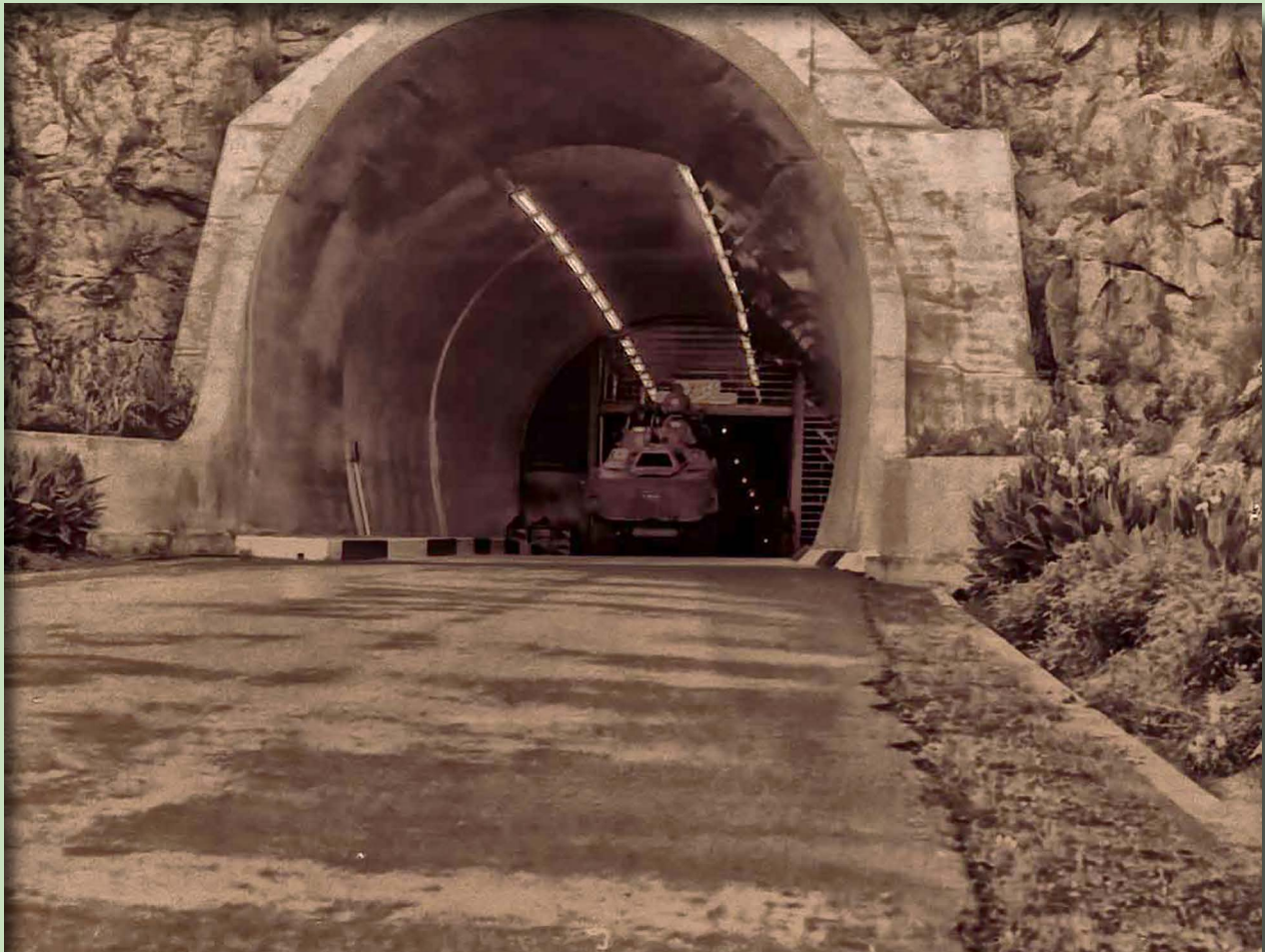
















### **Soul of Mist**

**My hart falters,  
danger tortures my soul,  
deep emotions feel unruffled,  
my thoughts can't find peace.**

**My soul has become foggy,  
unrecognisable from the mist  
that surrounds my body,  
a cloud of fear.**

**I left the camp  
in a marvellous piece of machinery,  
to the unknown twirling smoke  
that danced in the sky,  
in a ghostly manner,  
everything else looked dull.**

**A blacked burned body covered the road,  
the air was filled with astonishment,  
the silver chain gave the body shape,  
the silver was patched with black spots.**

**My shaking hand reached for the silver tag,  
my eyes filled with tears  
as I saw my name inscribed on the tag.**

**© Hugo Gerryts**



## 4 to 13 July Ogongo



Our deployment to Ogongo was aimed at confusing the enemy to think that we are the vanguard of a major operation. We simulate the exact behaviour as if the fake story was real. Firstly, we made the local population aware of our presence. Then we advanced to the border and spent a night right in the yati strip. This took place from 4 to 10 July. Up to the tenth everything worked out as intended. Interception on the enemy radio network confirmed this. As we returned to Ogongo base we thought that the action for now was over. So we had a barbeque on the Friday evening. Then we underestimated the enemy and our weekend was highlighted by a mine incident on 11 July. We also visited a UNITA base 10 km inside of Angola.

It was here that we attended one of the most striking church services. The base chaplain selected a text from Psalm 91: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." The sermon was concluded with the singing of Psalm 100. The harmonious voices were remarkable.

























## **Ode to the Mechanised Infantry Section**

**(Dedicated to Cpl S Moraites)**

**I'm a section leader – a corporal, an NCO  
I trust this Ratel under my direction  
And the men of my infantry section  
Together we cannot fail whatever we go**

**Deep footprints we have trod  
In Ovamboland's sand and sod  
Many days and long nights proving  
From Omuthiya to Eenhana moving  
And then at every battle and fight  
Through the day and through the night  
Mainga to Vimpulo without a break  
Eleven of us; a great team we make**

**Mutual understanding and mutual support  
Like true brothers as it ought  
Together each other accompanying well  
Even to the gates of hell**

### **My Driver**

**Encapsulated in the driver's station  
Fighting his fears with determination  
Fits of anger causing harm then receding  
And then quietly for forgiveness pleading**

### **My Gunner**

**Of small build and slender  
Nerves with steel cord centre  
Pumping rounds without respite  
Into a tank's solid side in a fight**

### **My Rifle Group**

**Four men yet a single sword they form  
The section's steel fist and storm**

**The number one strong, always working  
From danger never shirking**

**The number two philosopher-headed  
Deep anchors in his faith embedded  
Number three soft at heart  
Yet no problem for him too smart**

**The number four with a personal flair  
To turn everything into an adventure or dare**

### **My Light-machine Gun Group**

**My second in command, full of fire – a master  
At deployment of this automatic blaster**

**LMG numbers one and two  
Could leapfrog forever through and through  
Flanking fire they deliver  
Supporting us whenever the need  
Fire support flowing like a river  
With LMG and many belts indeed  
All this these three men's chosen deed**

### **My anti-aircraft gunner**

**Observing the bushes to starboard and port  
Eyes missing nothing of any import**

### **The Section leader**

**From the start  
What is my part  
In this eleven-man group  
With me number eleven in the loop**

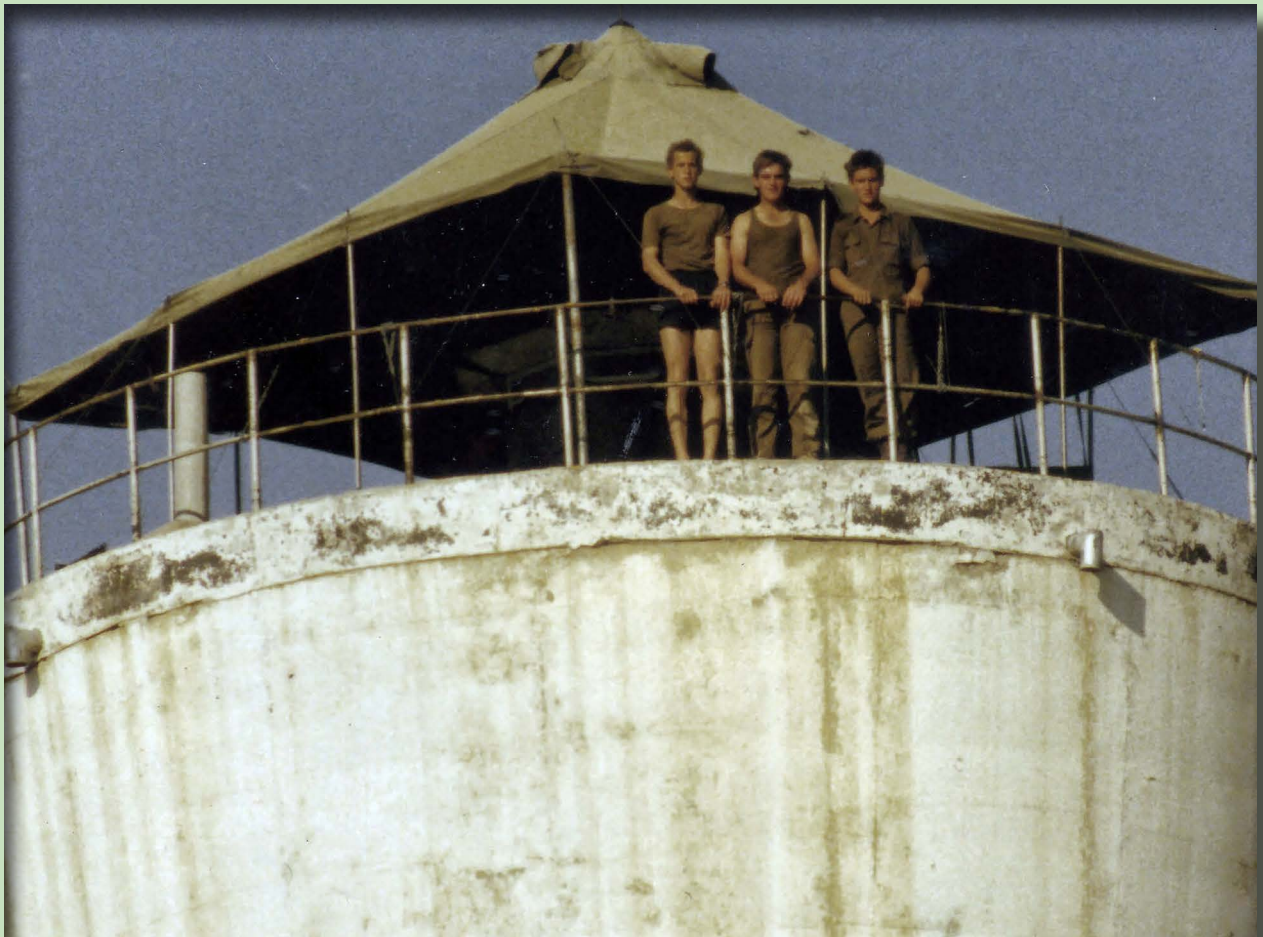
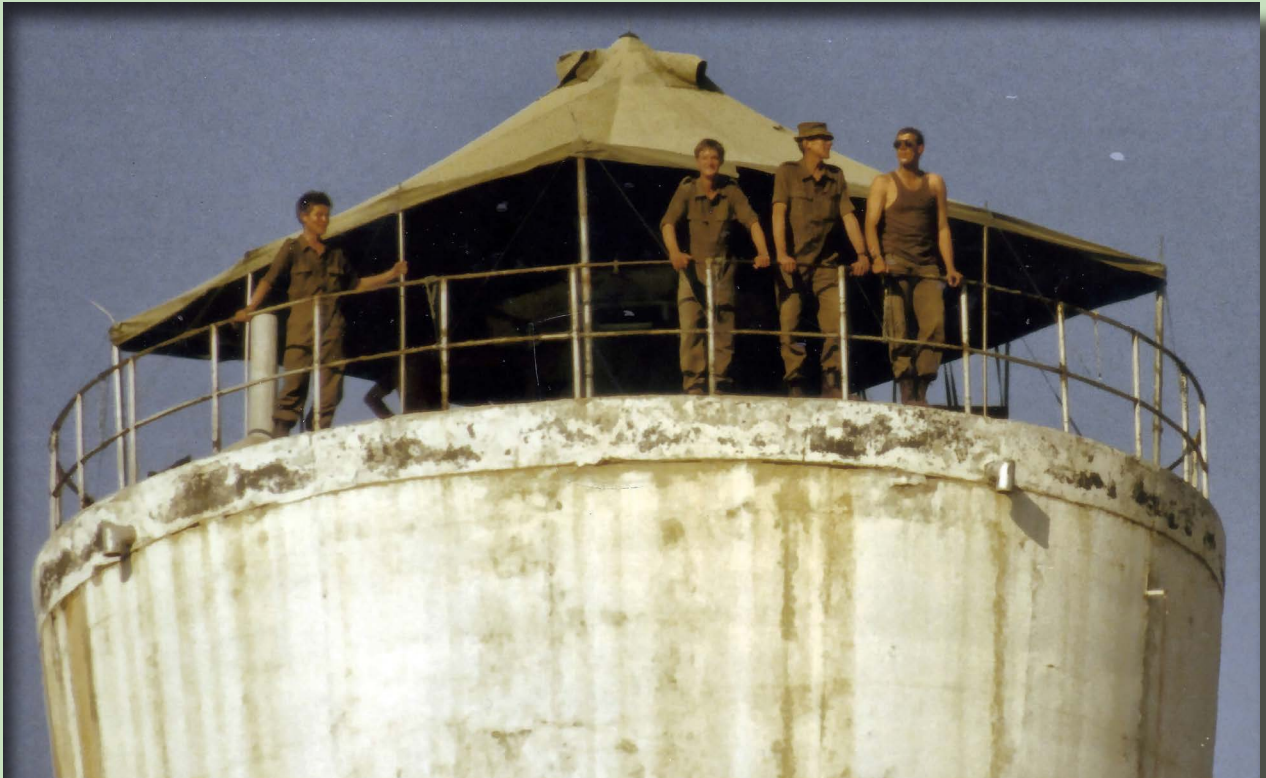
**We are the lowliest block in the force  
A team I built with my every resource  
On my own not much that I can do  
Without your power to see us through  
And so I salute you - ten good men  
That honour you earned both now and then**

**© Dawid Lotter**

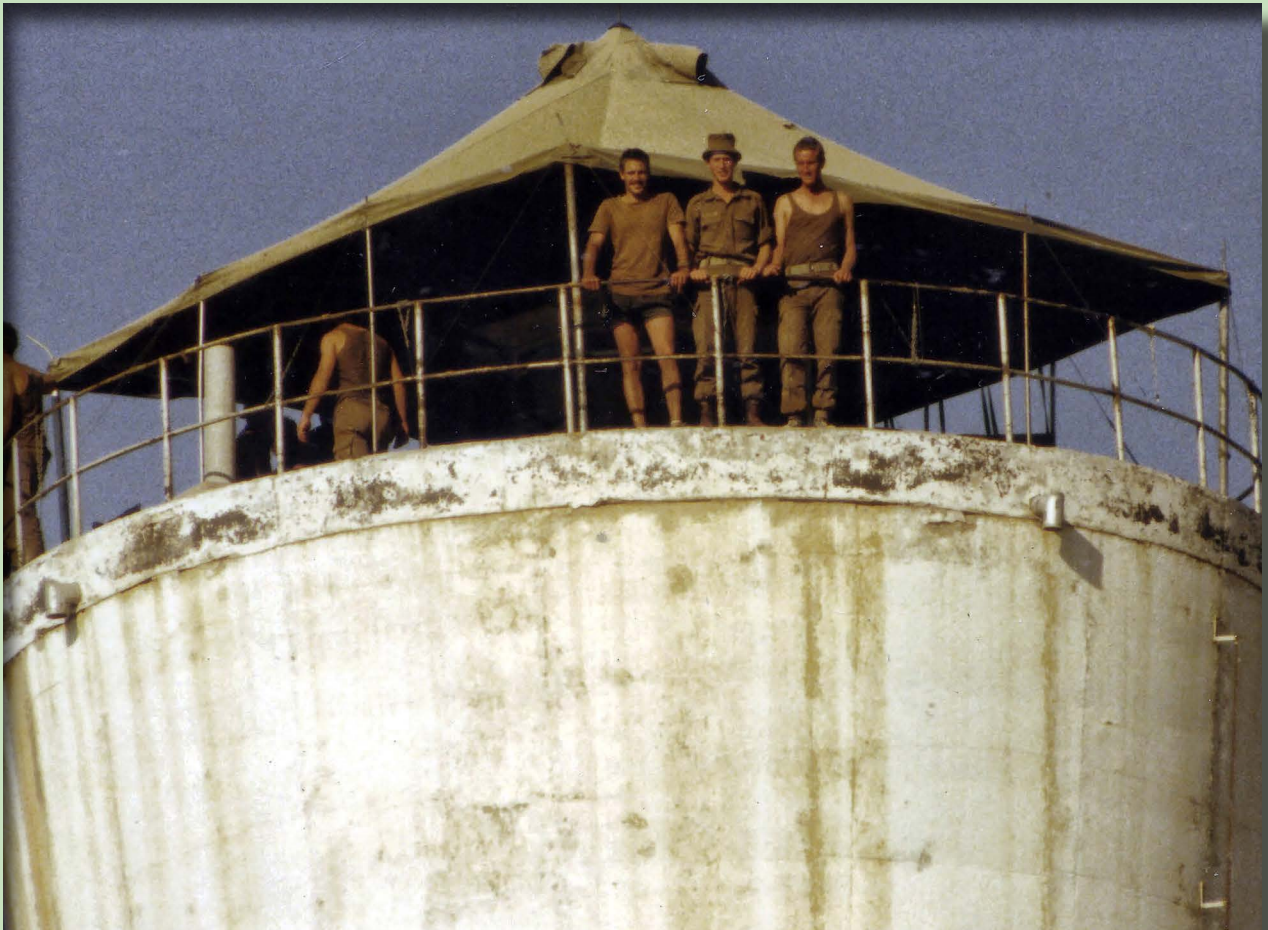
**Revised in English by Genl Tony Savides**



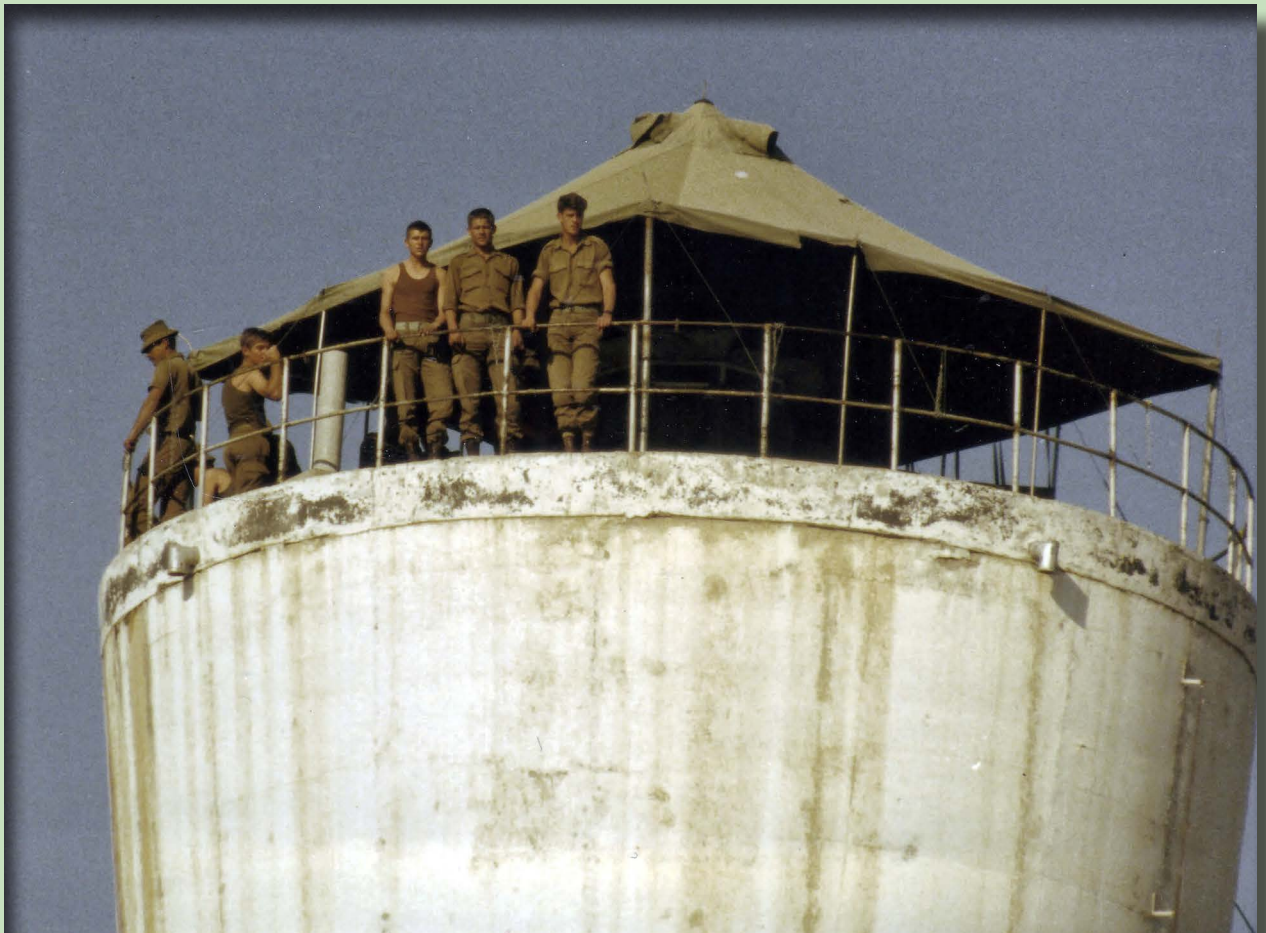
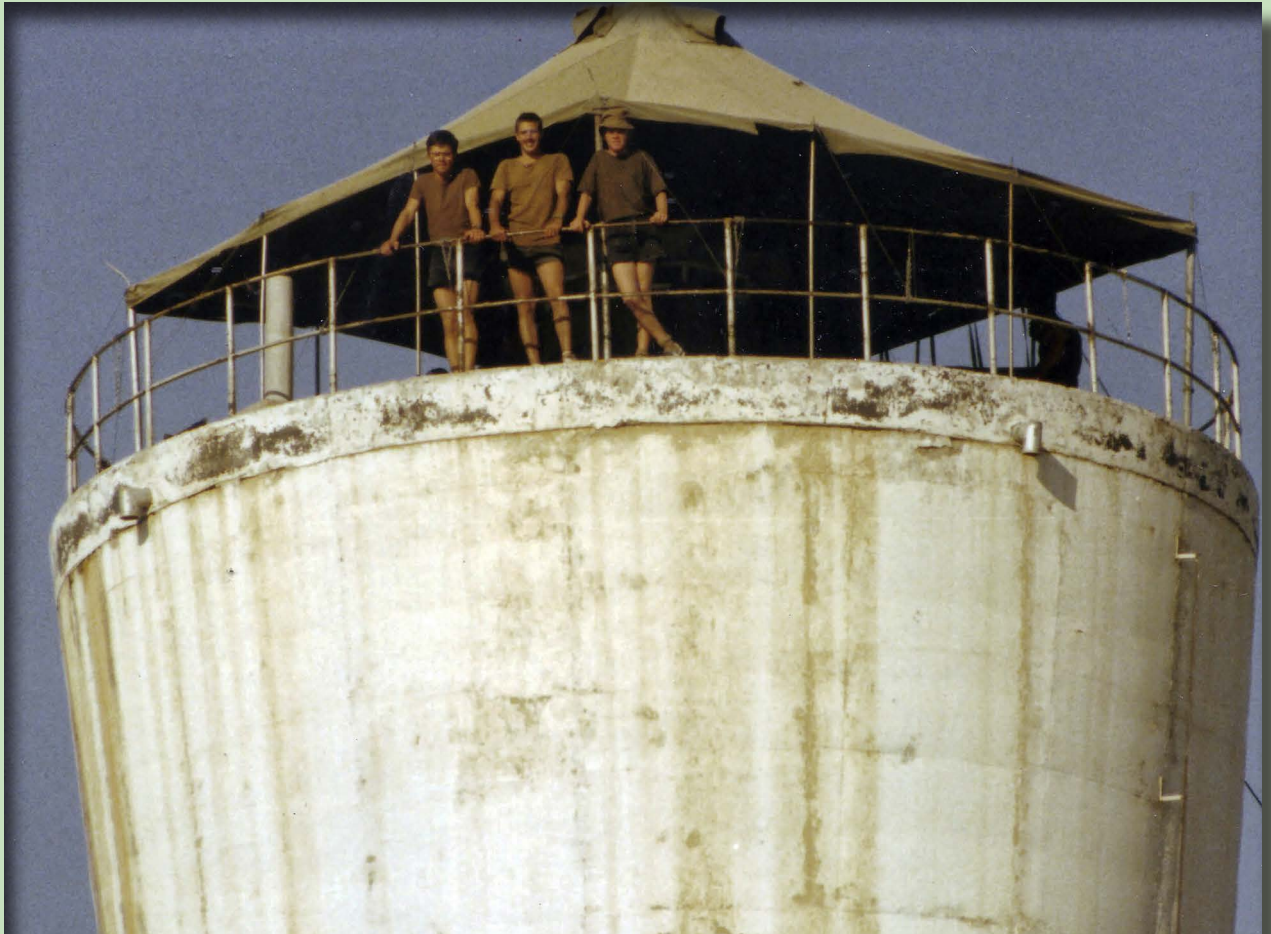
## Ogongo Watertower



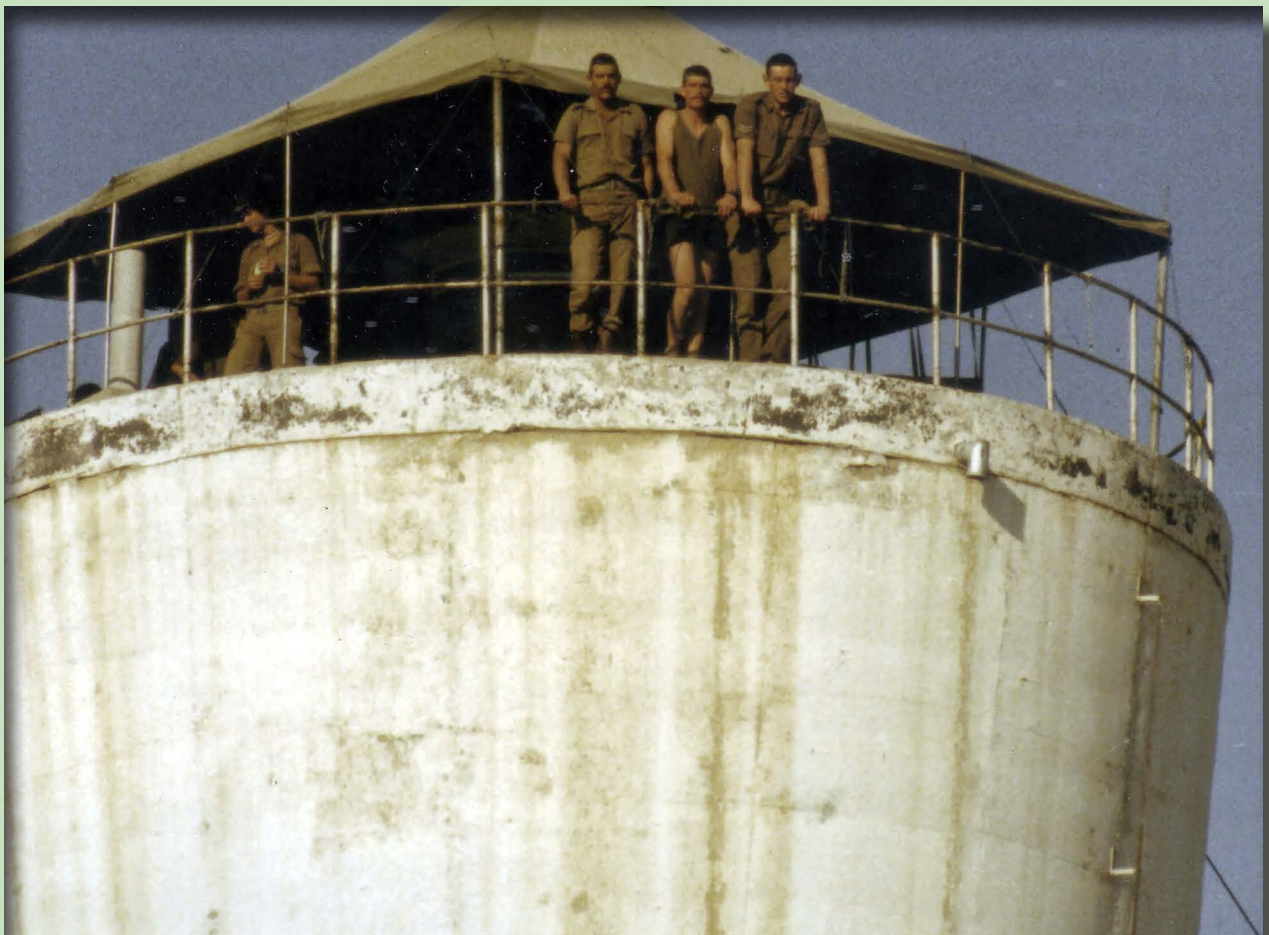
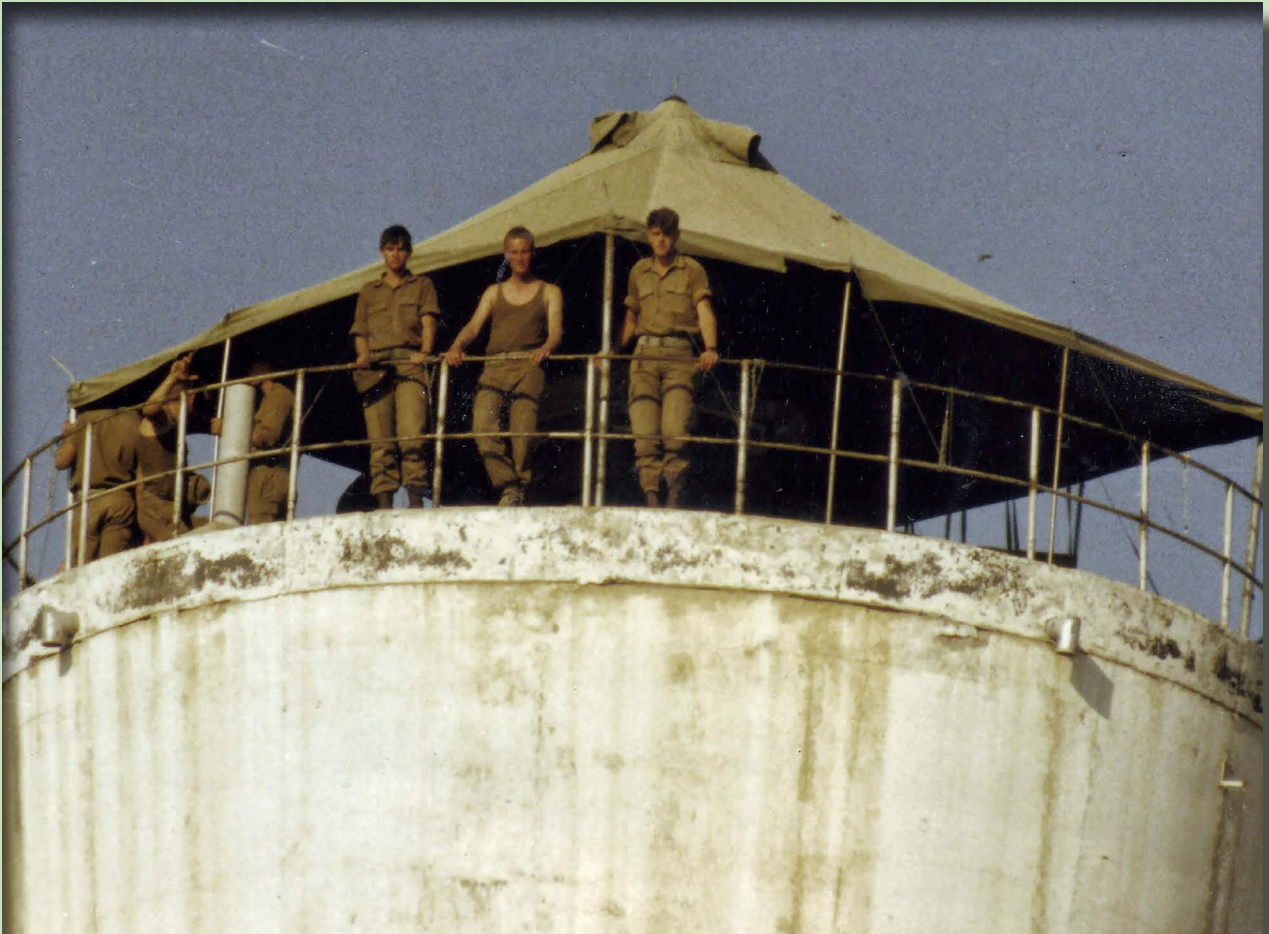


















## 11 July - Landmine at Ogongo



*Eric Du Plessis Recalls: I was leader of this Ratel and was trying to place a piece of Biltong in my mouth (whilst trying to avoid all the dust of the 20 odd Ratel's that are ahead) did not even hear the 'big bang' all I heard was that the internal radio system goes dead and was also trying to ask the driver if we hit a 'bump'... then there was black smoke and the driver was trying to open the hatch and I was shouting at the gunner to move the turret. Mostly shrapnel injuries and only a minor 'cracked lower leg bone' for one soldier. I do remember everyone's hesitation to approach the Ratel, specifically the Medic, I guess the concern was anti-personnel landmines. With my feet, I drag a path all the way the Medic and said safe travels. I opened all the doors and on the left side (not the side of the landmine damage) Out came Junior Le Roux covered in black soot. The best part of it all was that we also had a translator on board and he too picked up shrapnel. I do know that the radio in the turret protected the Gunner from a lot of extra shrapnel. The tiny delay in the explosion (i.e. it did not explode as the front wheel hit) was what perhaps saved the driver. The other luck for the day was the all the ammo did not explode, specifically the full box of hand-grenades that were dislodged and thrown left.*

















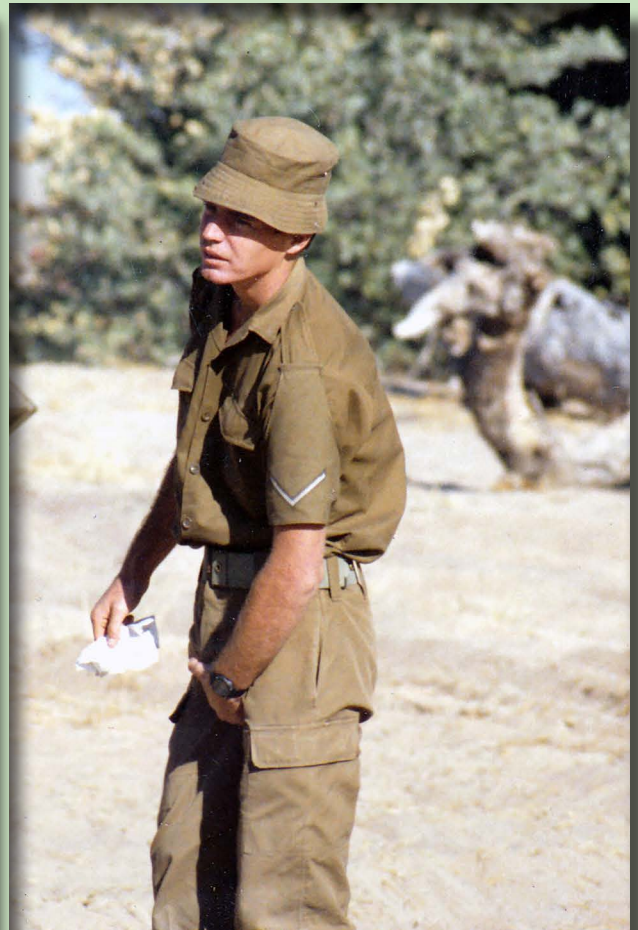




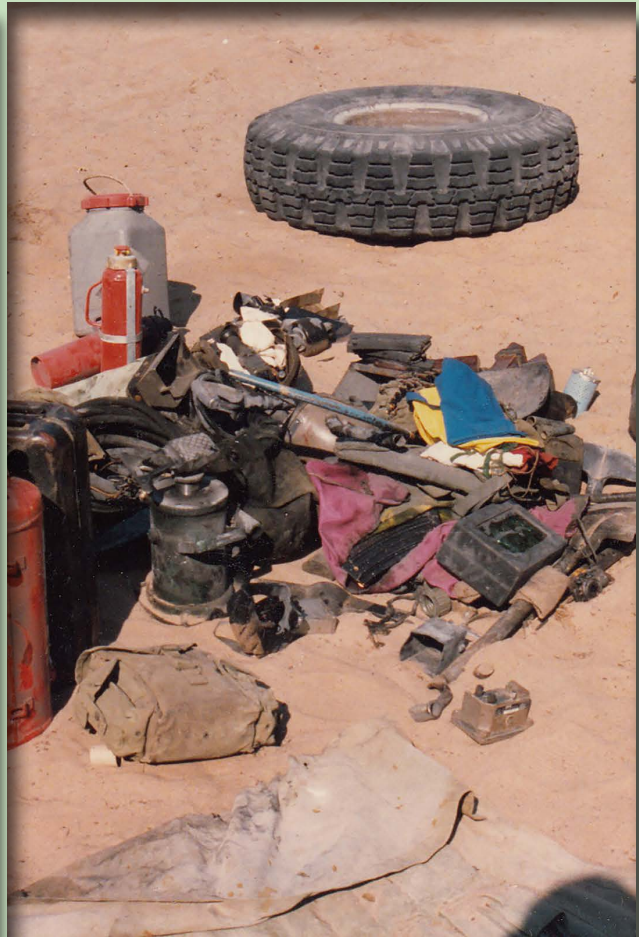














## 11 July - Visit Unita































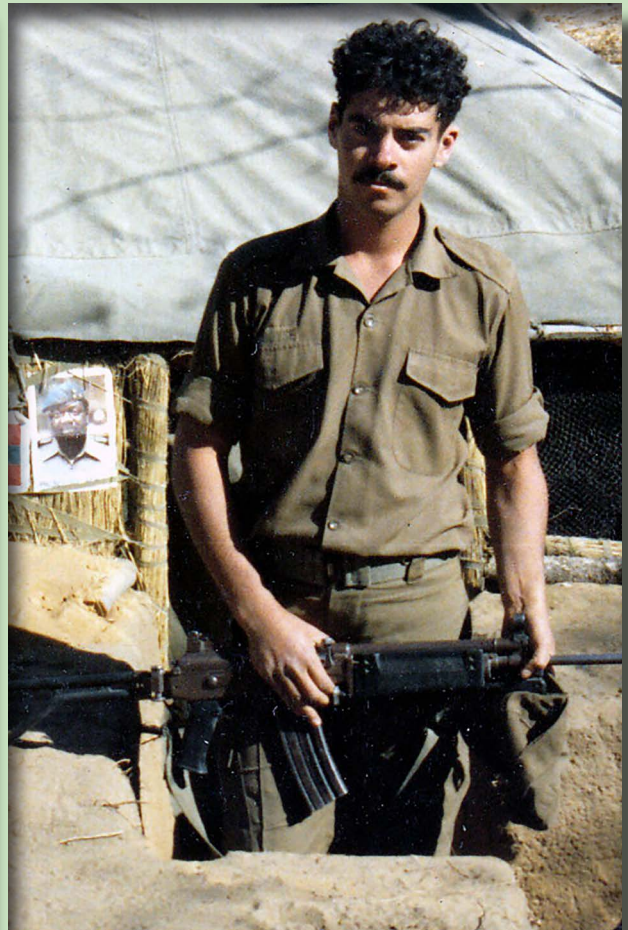
















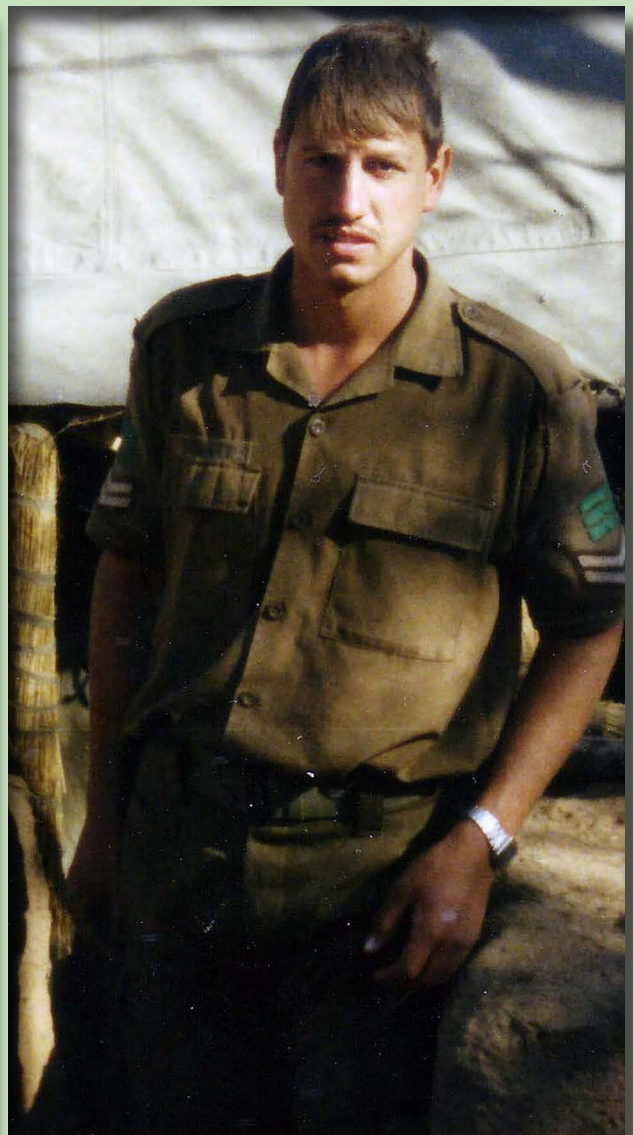








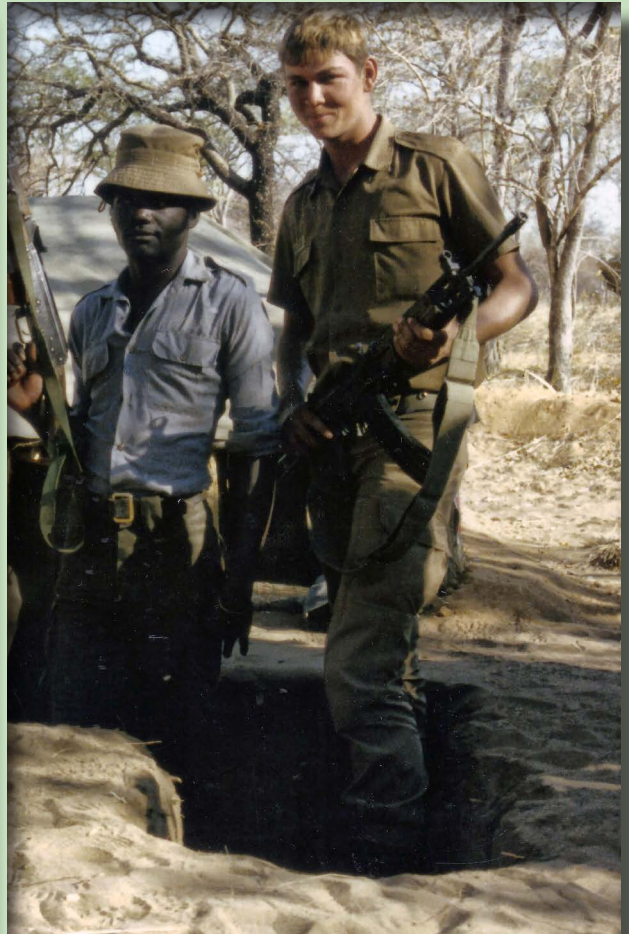




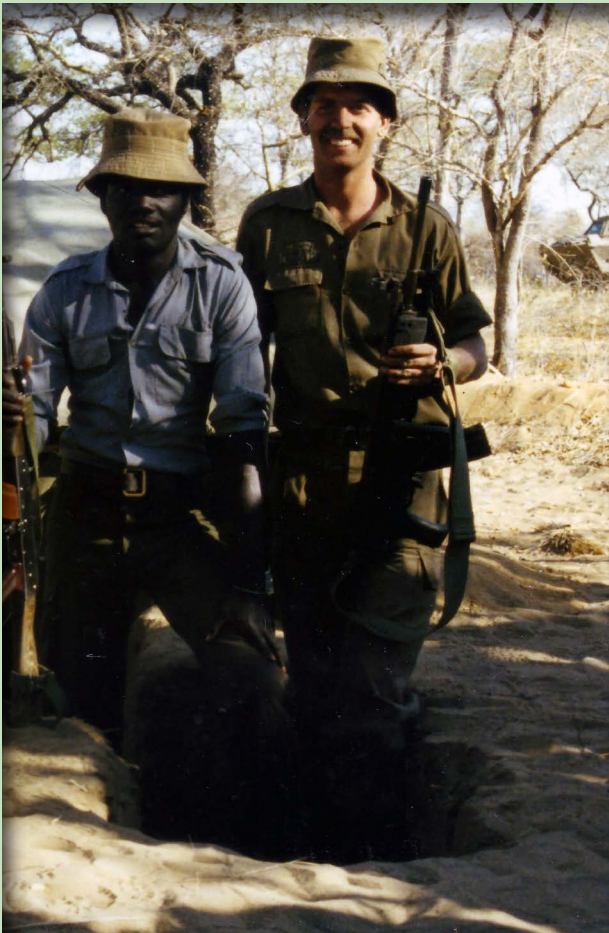
















### **Snatches of Valhalla**

**Comrade – can I pick you up?  
If you should fall  
I shall, without call  
Without asking or retort  
Give you support**

**Just for now!  
Just for thou!**

**Comrade – Can I lead you?  
When of nothing joyful you can think  
And into a hole you would sink  
I am there, at your arm  
‘Till your feelings calm**

**Just for now!  
Just for thou!**

**Comrade- may I be one with you?  
As the bomb rends  
And your life ends  
Shall we in unison take flight  
Like a meteorite  
With mass disintegrating  
At the speed of light dissipating**

**We – discrete packages of energy  
Re-united in heroic synergy  
At Valhalla’s portal  
From hence no longer mortal  
For future battle gathered anew  
Bound together with a future view**

**Just for now!  
E =mc Square  
Just for thou!**

**© Dawid Lotter  
Revised in English by Genl Tony Savides**



## 11 July - Braaivleis - Ogongo













































































## 30 July to 8 August -Ondangwa - Oshikango



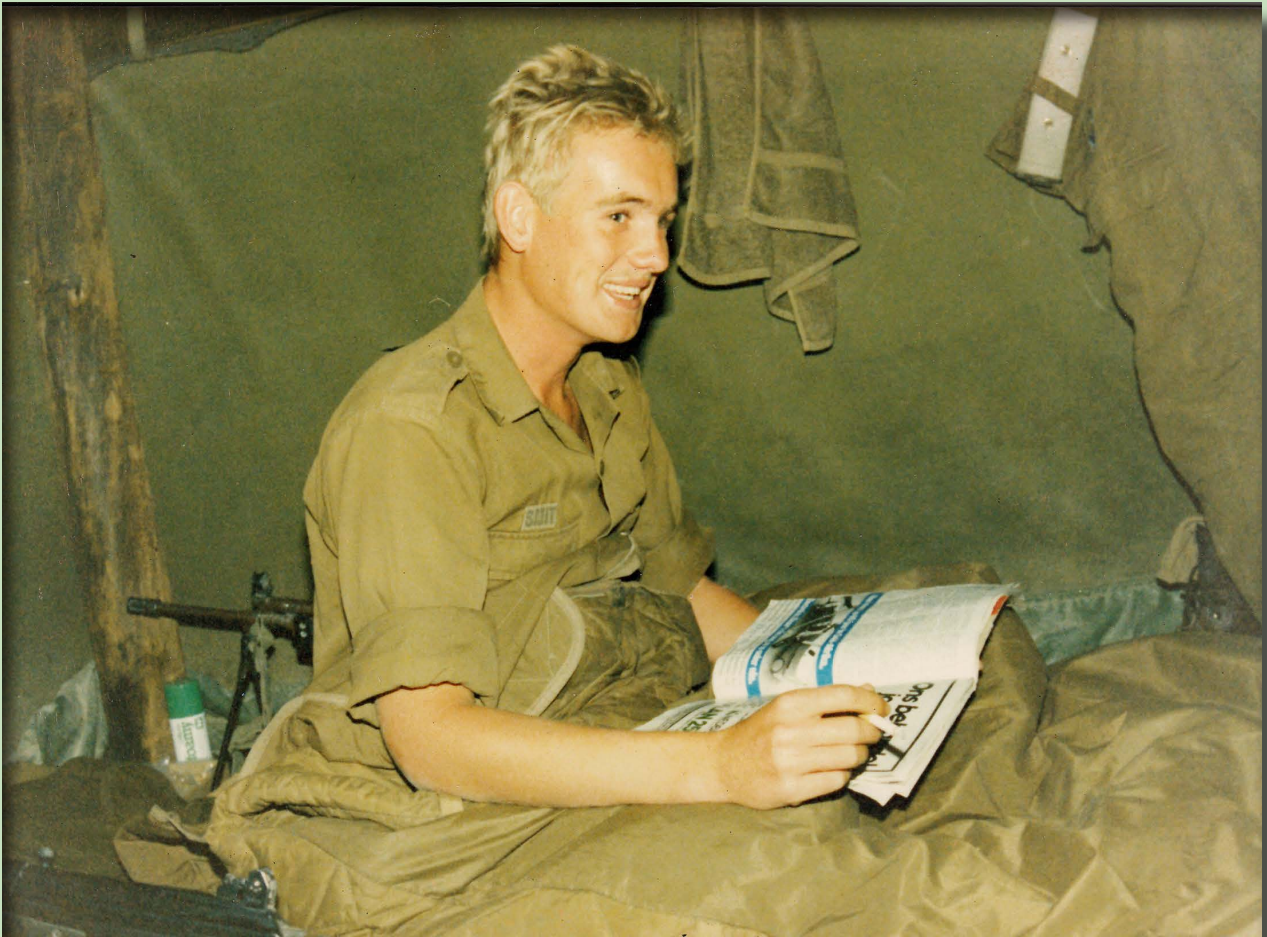
It was just a matter of time before the FAPLA offensive would start. Seven brigades were identified in the Quito Cuanevale area. A Cuban regiment was deployed to protect Menongue itself and the major air base there. Fighter aircraft would operate from Menongue and, together with helicopters, from Cuito Cuanavale. Soviet equipment continued to flow in. The FAPLA armoured corps was brought up to about 500 tanks. The FAPLA air force received more combat aircraft – additional MiG-23 fighters, Su-22 strike aircraft and several types of combat and assault helicopters.

Bravo deployed as a show of force and to protect the AFB Ondangwa against the increasing possibility of SWAPO attacks.

*Robert Torrani Recalls: "While on deployment around Ondangwa. The platoon was busy following 23 Ratel with the Ratels behind driving in the tracks of the front Ratel. There was a sharp little stump in the tracks and it punctured all three tyres down the left side of the Ratels. It meant 23A, 23B and 23C had punctures. We had a combined four spares on the platoons Ratels and nine punctures. It meant we had to hang the middle diffs on ratels with chains and limp back to Ondangwa so our tyres could be repaired."*











***Diary Theuns Cloete***

***30 Jul - Depart to Ondangwa. Arrived 16:00. We slept in the transit camp.***

***31 - Slept the whole day and departed for night work at 18:00. Worked through the night.***

***1 to 5 Aug - Sleep during daytime and deployed on foot patrols during the night.***

***6 to 7 - Deployed to Etale base doing patrol work and visit the destroyed borderpost at Oshikango/ Santa Clara.***

***8 - Departed back to Omuthiya. Arrived 10:00. Demobilise and barbeque.***



























































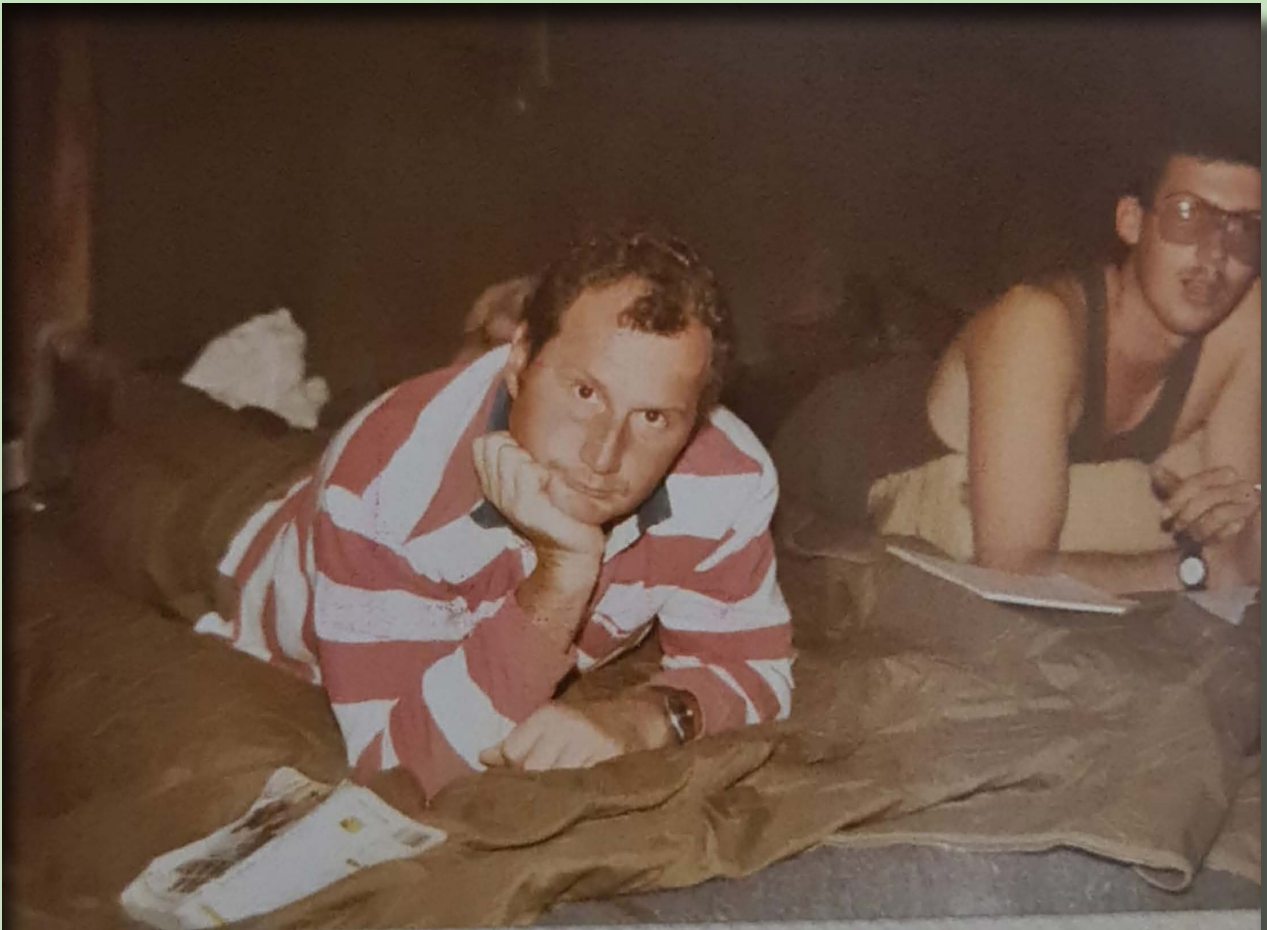


































Sector 10 Armour Sqn was busy with similar operations at the same time and in the same area. They visited a kraal and wanted to search one of the huts after talking to the headman. Two troops went to the corrugated iron hut. When they opened the door, one was shot in the face and the other shot dead through the window. The other troops ran back to their armoured vehicles and then shot up the whole kraal. Bravo visited the scene. I think we realized afterwards, things might look quiet – but the enemy is everywhere.



*Jaco Swanevelder recalls: “During this deployment we (Call Sign 71) were sent out one morning to investigate a shooting at a kraal or cuca-shop. Upon arrival we find this young Ovambo who was apparently shot during a quarrel. The murderer was nowhere to be found. Our instructions were to take the body to the closest police office. My driver, Le Roux, was not very impressed when I gave instructions to put the body in the isle next to the Ratel engine, rather than on top of the vehicle. The man was shot in the head and still bleeding a lot. We did not have a body bag for some obscure reason and the result was an isle full of blood by the time we reached the police.”*











## 11 to 18 August - Bittersoet I



Already in May 1987, it was clear that FAPLA planned a large offensive against Mavinga. The first SADF liaison team deployed with UNITA on 14 May.

Savimbi requested assistance against the large numbers of FAPLA tanks. Approval was granted for the deployment of Special Forces, as a tank destroying force, by the end of May. By 11 June approval was granted to prepare 61 Mech.

The unit would however only deploy when absolutely necessary and as a last resort. We departed to Bittersoet on 11 August. Cmdt Smit and the 61 Mech command group participated in five days of planning at Rundu. Cmdt Smit assessed that if the unit was indeed to be deployed it would have to use its full conventional capability and the utilisation of its full fighting capability. It was also made clear that the South African government and military high command would only deploy overt conventional forces if limited force employment proved to be unsuccessful.

It was obvious that 61 Mech was likely to be heavily involved in whatever was going to happen. Cmdt Smit requested permission to go back to Omuthiya for more refresher training, since the Bittersoet area was too small for the purpose of proper manoeuvres and the proximity of civilians would not allow use of its main weapon systems. Permission was granted and the unit returned to its base area at Omuthiya.



### *Diary Theuns Cloete:*

*10 - Mobilisation.*

*11 - Depart to Rundu. Very long convoy. Arrive during the late night.*

*12 - Maj Lotter give us a debrief. Nothing further happened.*

*13 - Calibration and shooting in of our weapons.*

*14 to 15 - Waiting. Nothing happened.*

*16 - Maj Lotter give us an operational debrief. Church parade.*

*17 - Waiting. Nothing happened.*

*18 - Depart to Omuthiya.*



## A Game of Rounders - And Waiting



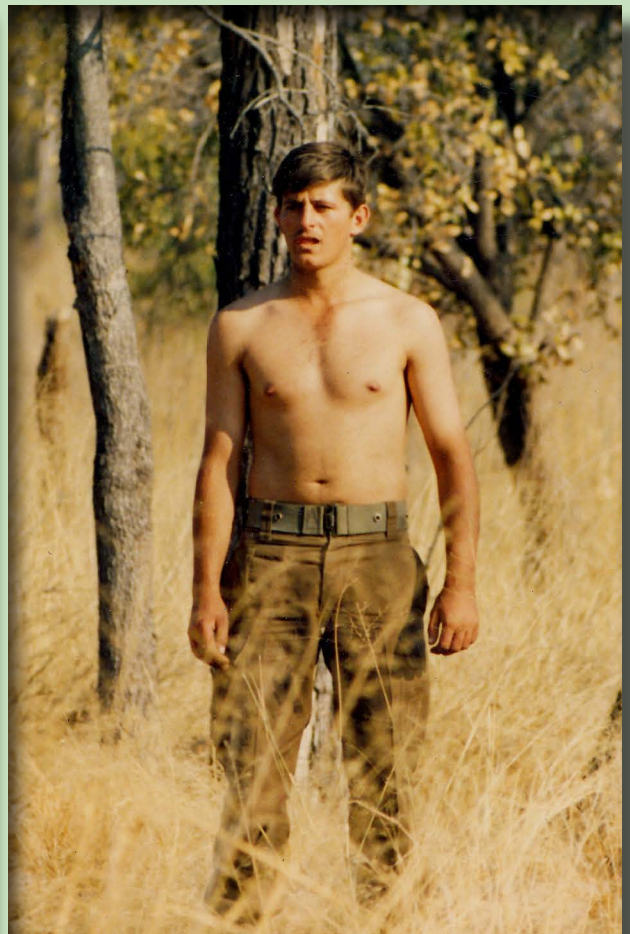
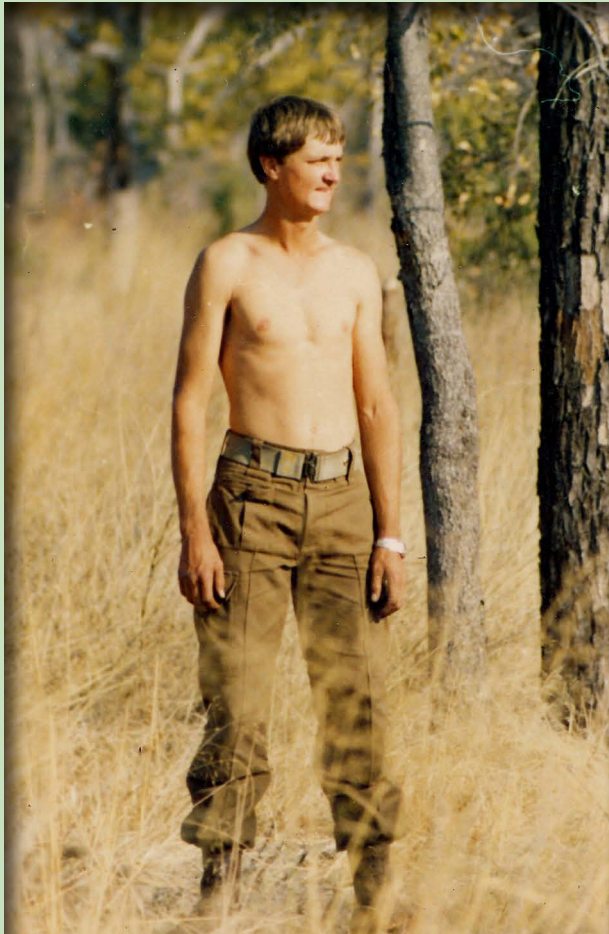












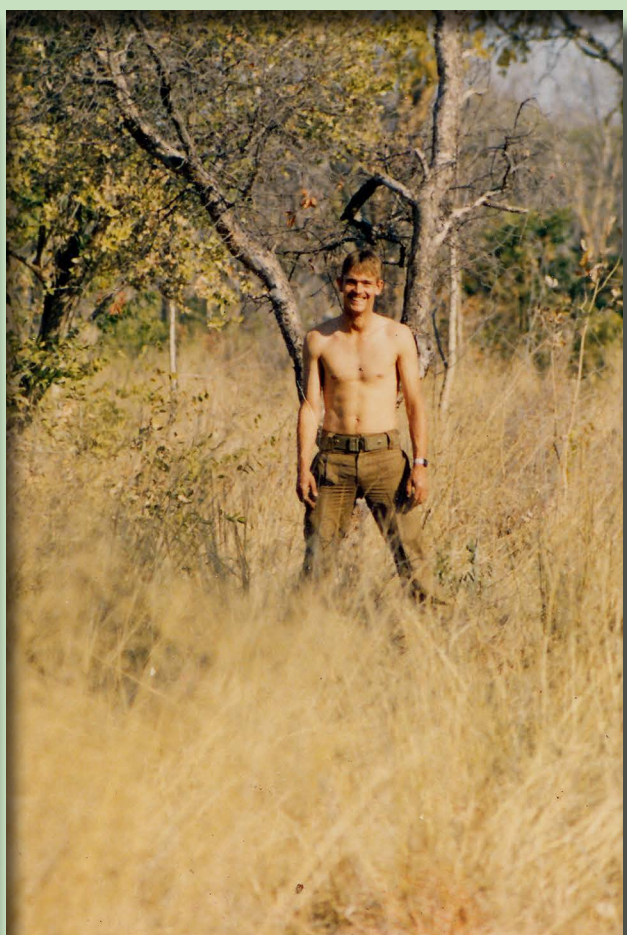
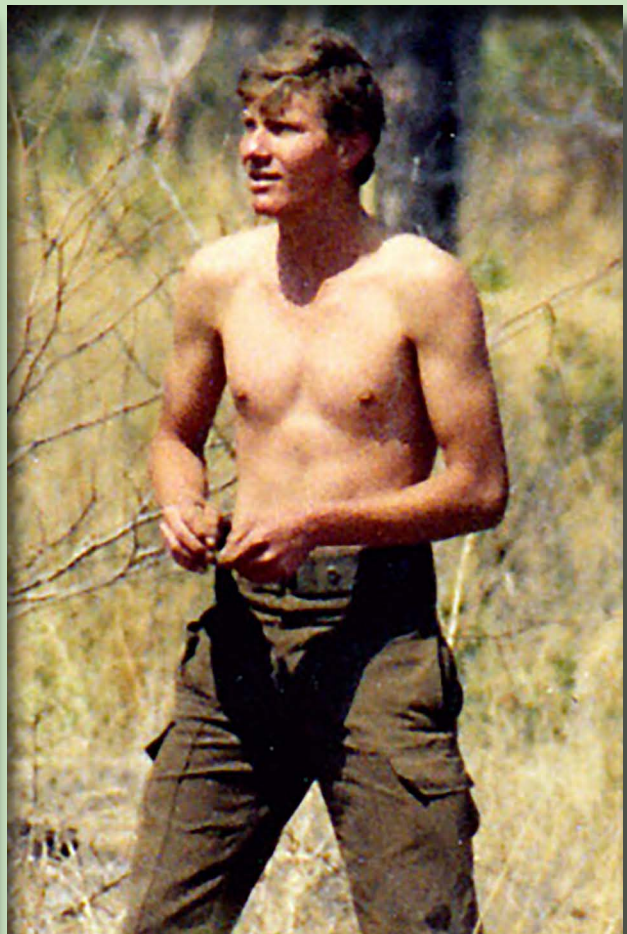
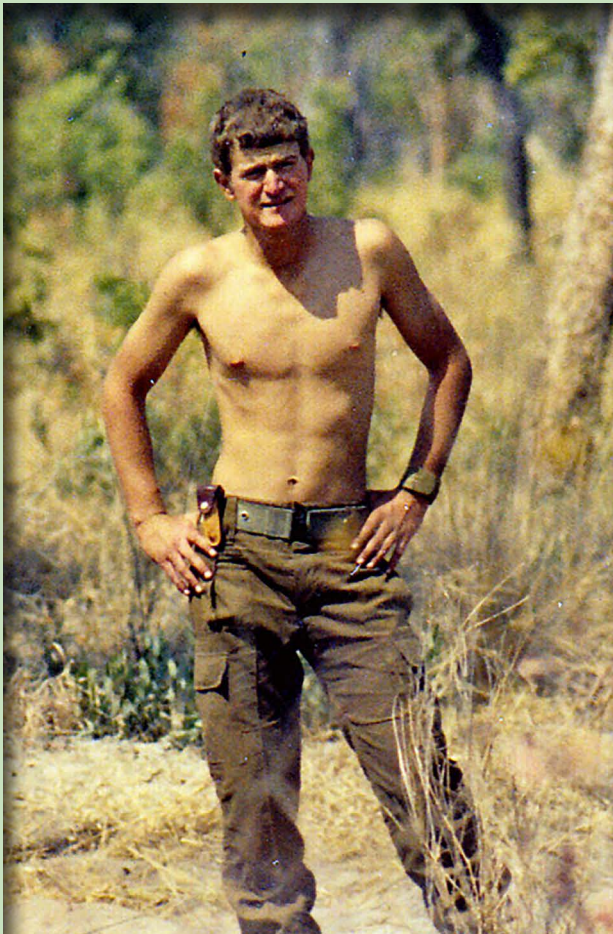














## Thinking - And Waiting







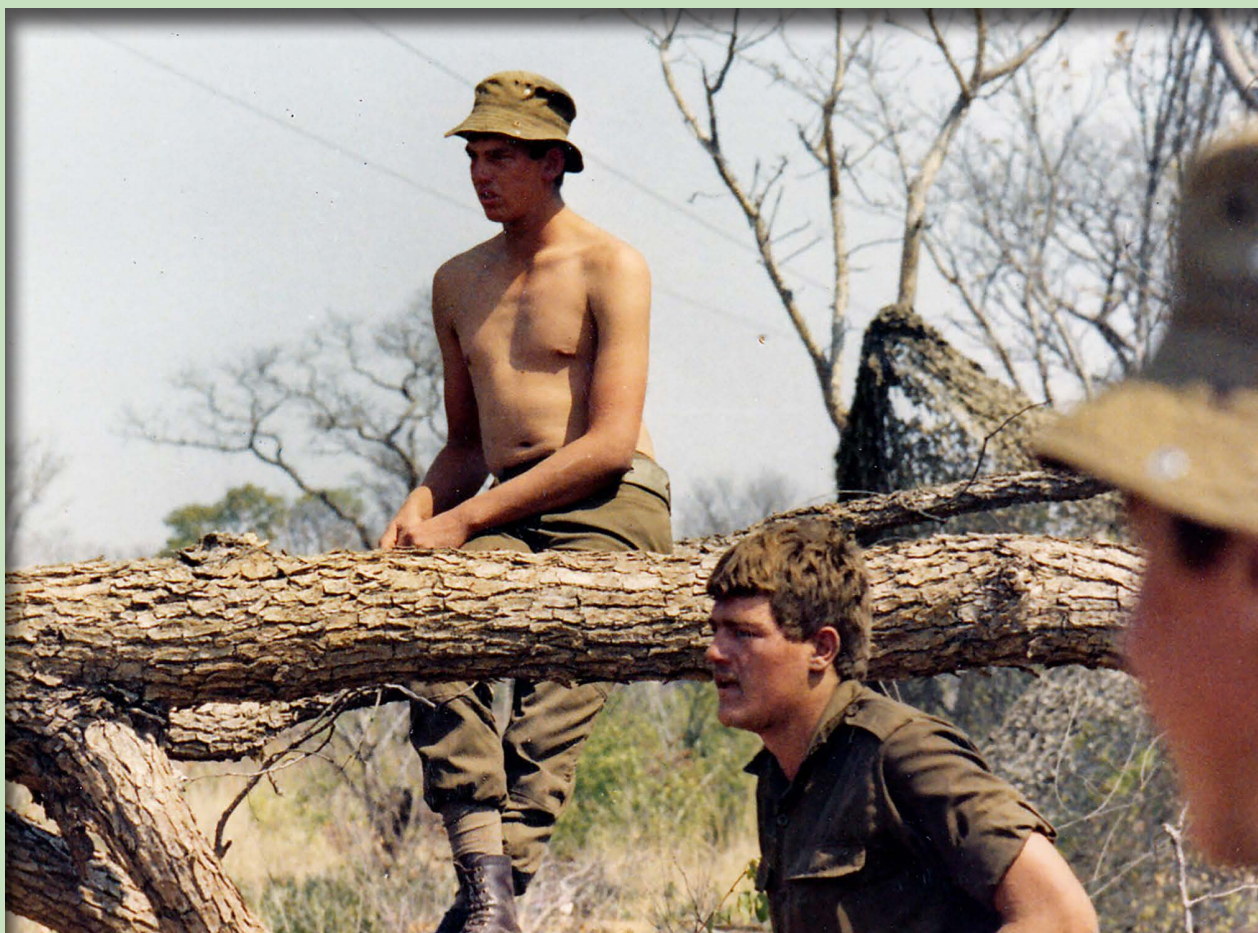














## Eating - And Waiting

























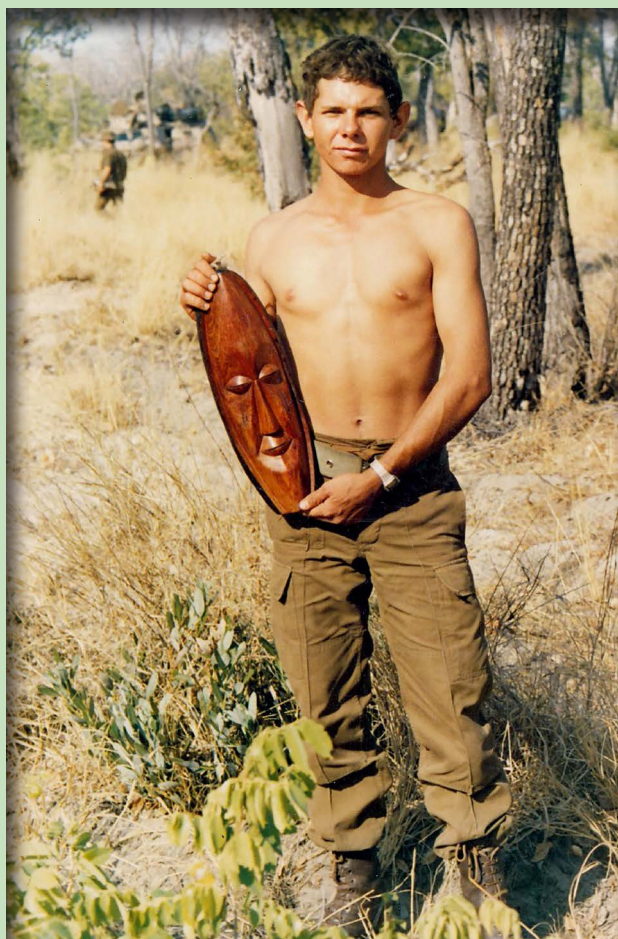




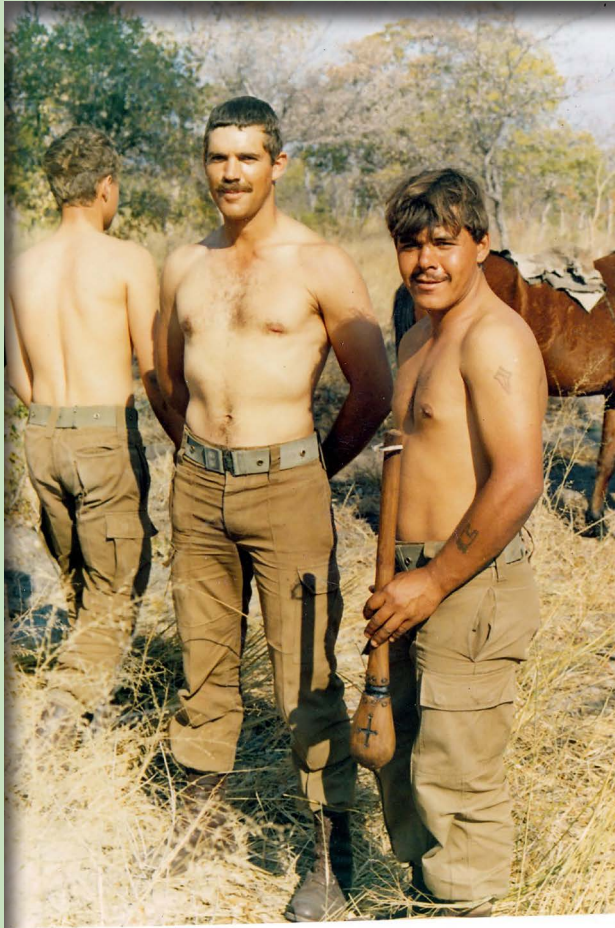




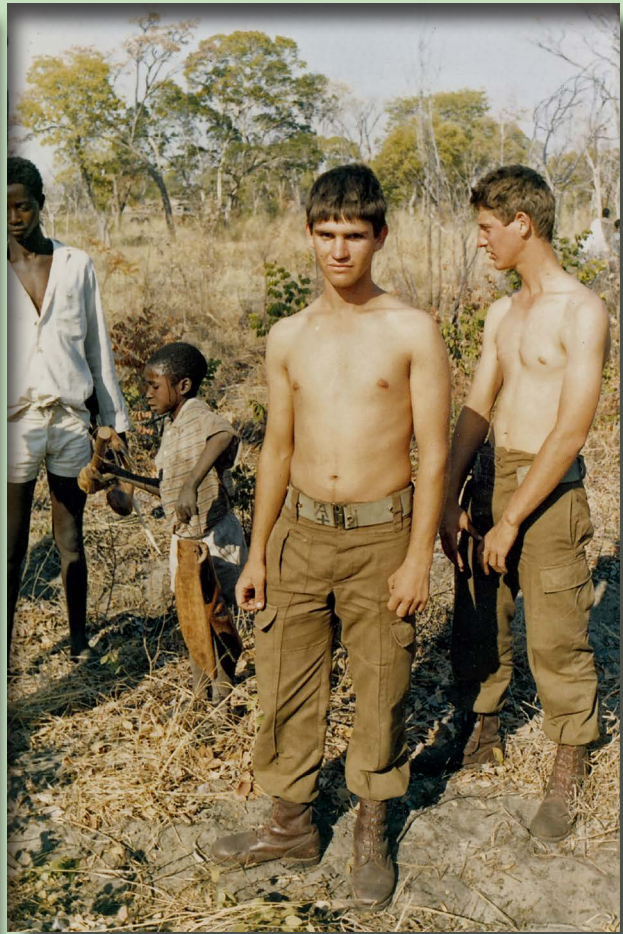
## Buying Curios - And Waiting



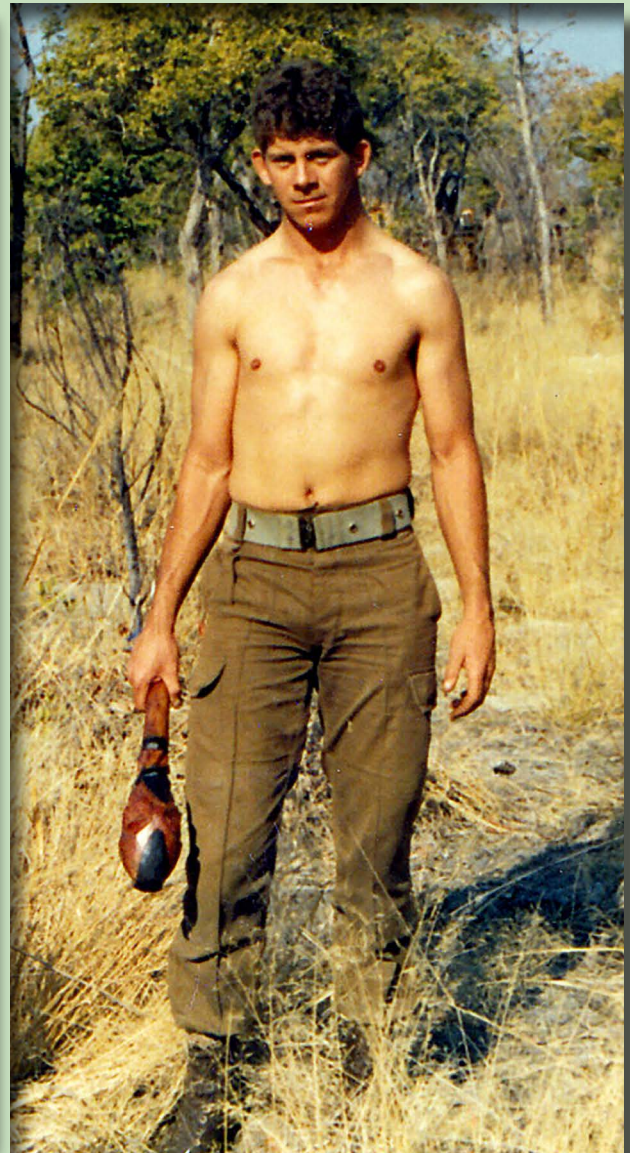




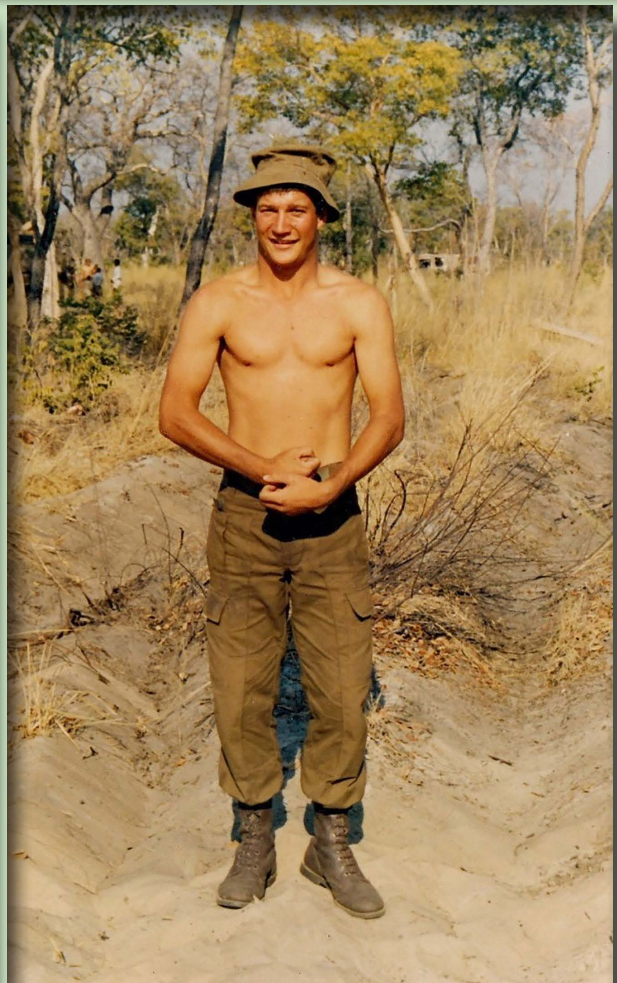
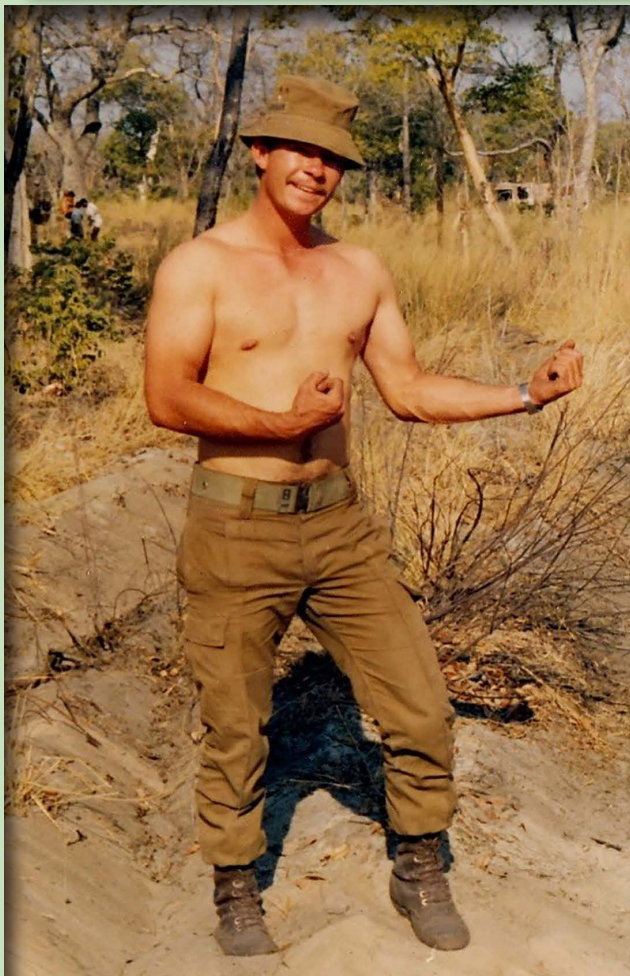














## 19 to 27 August - Final Preparations - Omuthiya



Back at Omuthiya we engaged into full-scale preparation, honing men and equipment to ultimate sharpness. Now it was only a question of whether – or more likely when - 61 Mech would be activated. The week 61 Mech spent at Omuthiya passed in a frenzy of activity for everyone.



### *Diary Theuns Cloete*

*19 - Ratel 90's gets turret night sights installed. Cleaning and maintenance of equipment.*

*20 - Cleaning of Ratel engines.*

*21 - Build targets and shooting in main armaments. Film team shooting video footage.*

*22 - Held a massive fake parade on the Omuthiya parade ground together with Infantry School and 101 Bn. We had to cover every piece of exposed skin with dark brown paste to simulate an all-black army.*

*23 - Equipment maintenance*

*24 - Shooting in of main armaments.*

*25 to 26 - Mobilisation. Shooting in of Browning machine guns. Hand in of all personal equipment at the CSQM store and Blokhuis.*

*27 - Depart to Bittersoet to arrive there at about 18:00.*

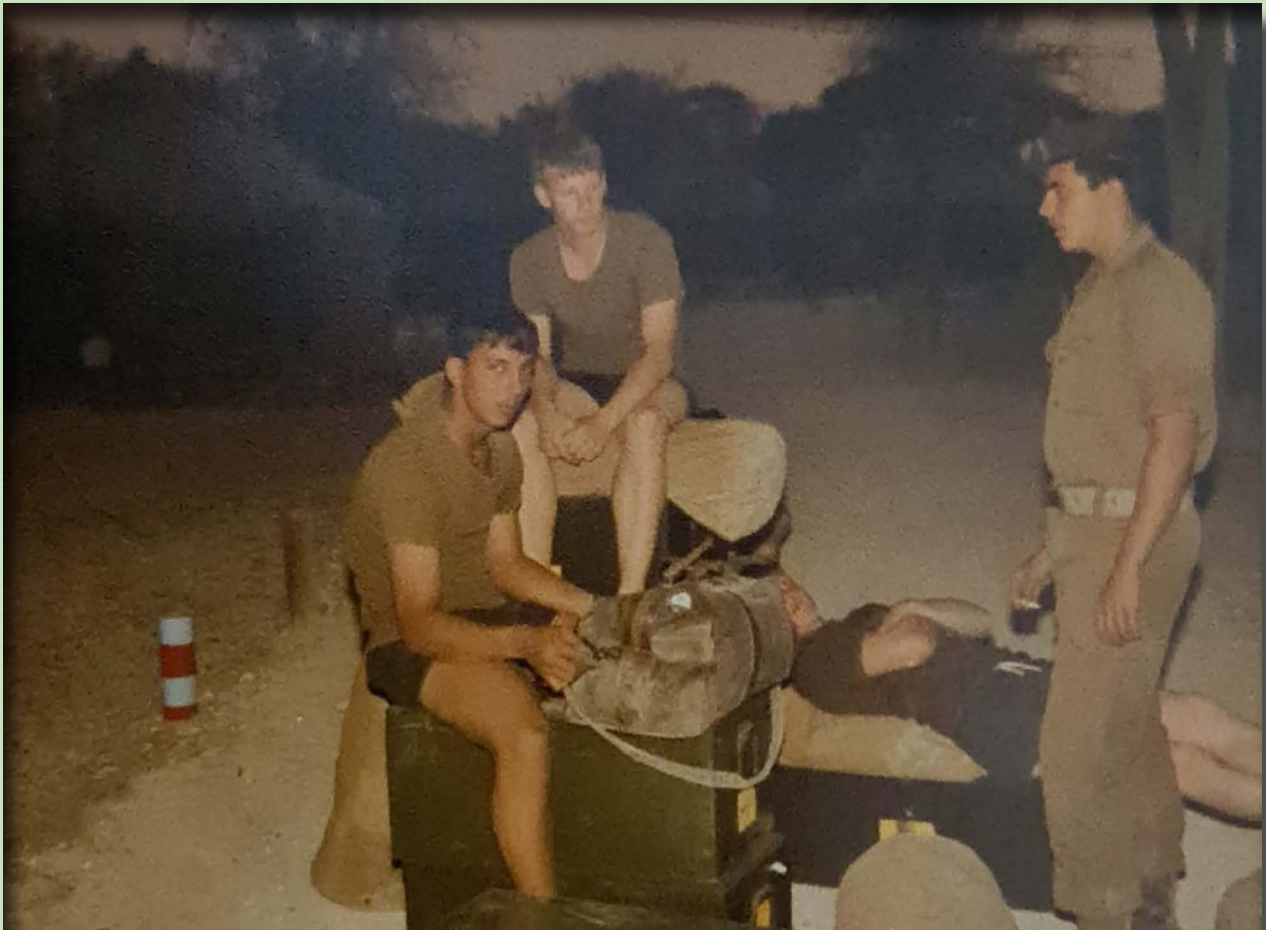


















## 27 to 1 September Bittersoet II



On 29 August the FAPLA brigades slow advance suddenly accelerated. 47 Brigade and its attached Tactical Group 1 moved along the north bank of the Lomba, reached the source by the 31st, rounded it and carried on eastwards along the south bank. At the same time 59 Brigade moved up to the Cuzizi River and crossed it on its TMM bridges, and by the 31st had deployed about 6km north of the Cunzumbia/Lomba confluence. 21 Brigade moved from the Cunzumbia source along its east bank to the Lomba, covering 40km in two days.

On 29 August Cmdt Smit received the final clearance that 61 Mech must start the advance.

### *Diary Theuns Cloete*

*28 - Lectures/ operational and intelligence briefings.*

*29 - Casualty evacuation training.*

*30 - Church and final movement orders to depart during the night.*

*31 - Start with the advance. We passed Rundu al the way to Katima Mulilo and over the bridge into Angola.*





## OPERATION MODULAR

Operation Modular was a military operation by the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the South African Border War. It formed part of what has come to be called the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale. The Angolan objective was to advance south-east to attack the UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) at Mavinga. The SADF objective was to protect UNITA by stopping that advance. The advance was halted with heavy Angolan casualties. The South African forces and its UNITA allies then began offensive operations against the Angolan forces, who had retreated back to a defensive line east of the Cuito River with the objective of destroying them once and for all.



## BRAVO - ENTERING THE WAR



### Mobilisation

In May 1987 it was clear that FAPLA planned a large operation against Mavinga. The first SADF liaison team deployed with UNITA on 14 May. An appreciation of the situation was carried out and five FAPLA Brigades were identified. Savimbi requested assistance against the large numbers of FAPLA tanks. Approval was granted for the deployment of Special Forces, as a tank destroying force, by the end of May. By 11 June approval was granted to prepare 61 Mech Bn Gp.

The unit would however only deploy when absolutely necessary and as a last resort. During June 61 Mech Bn Gp was deployed on an eight day operation around Oshakati. The purpose was show-of-force and it was hoped that the movements would be reported to FAPLA. The unit left for the Bittersoet training area at Rundu for further show-of-force.

Cmdt Smit and the 61 Mech command group participated in five days of planning at Rundu. It became clear that 61 Mech would probably become involved in the operation. Higher HQ wanted to keep 61 Mech at Bittersoet but Cmdt



Smit reasoned that proper maintenance could not be performed at Bittersoet. We then returned to Omuthiya for proper maintenance, stacking and packing plans.

### Force Levels



The available forces were 61 Mech, 32 Bn and 101 Bn. To maintain a balance of two strong forces and a reserve, restructuring took place.

#### 20 Brigade - Colonel Deon Ferreira

##### Battle Group Alpha - Commandant Kobus Smit

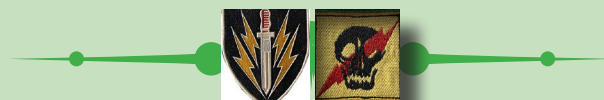
- One mechanised company - 61 Mech
- One motorized company - 32 Battalion
- One armoured car squadron - Ratel 90
- One 81mm mortar platoon - 4 x Ratels
- One 20mm mobile anti-aircraft unit

##### Battle Group Bravo - Commandant Robbie Hartsliet

- One motorized company - 32 Battalion
- Two motorized company's - 101 Battalion
- One motorized platoon - 32 Battalion
- One armoured car squadron - Ratel-90
- One 81mm mortar platoon - 4 x Ratels

##### Battle Group Charlie - Major Dawid Lotter

- One mechanised company - 61 Mech
- One anti-tank platoon - Ratel 90
- One 81mm mortar platoon - 4 x Ratels





## Advance from Rundu to Mavinga



By 28 August two FAPLA brigades were within 4km of the Lomba River. On 29 August the G5's (155mm calibre towed howitzers) was flown in. The restrictions on 61 Mech Bn Gp were lifted at the same time. The combined, larger force would be known as 20 Brigade (Bde) from then on but it was calculated that this force would not be operational before 6 September. However, both 47 and 59 Bde's were at, and south of the Lomba River by 31 August.

The restriction on deployment of 61 Mech were lifted on 29 August and we left Bittersoet bound for Mavinga at best speed. On 30 August we received movement orders. Cmdt Smit flew to the Bde HQ for planning. On 31 August we departed from Bittersoet to Rundu to Katima Mulilo (300 km) cross the bridge over the Okavango river to Angola and travelled through the night westwards. We moved in packets of sub units to be less vulnerable from air attacks. It would also have made it difficult for the enemy to determine our strength. Maj Danie Laas with the navigation vehicle was in front, marking the route, and the rest of us followed. This wasn't difficult south of the Kavango river but on the Angolan side terrain problems increased.











*Ben Smit recalls: “On the way to Luenge, the Tiffies had to recover a Rinkhals ambulance. They used a kinetic rope, connected to a Withings recovery vehicle. This resulted in the undercarriage of the Rinkhals remaining in the riverbed, while the body landed on the river bank.”*





## Main Force to Luenge



Our main force reached the Luenge forward refuelling point on 2 September. At Luenge we could not refuel due to a brush fire that destroyed the diesel reserves the previous night. The available fuel was contaminated. We had to use our own fuel from the B Coy echelon. S/Sgt Smit arrived with the B Coy echelon during the night. A guide directed them to our position. We refuelled and prepared to depart in haste to Mavinga. Ben and the echelon had to stay behind at Luenge when we continued to the front. They had to wait for the arrival of the 61 Mech echelon to replenish.

### *Diary Hugo Gerryts*

*1 Sept - Advance further west with the Okavango River to our south. Late afternoon Maj Lotter gave us the operation plan and issue orders for the advance to Mavinga. Our artillery was very successful delaying the FAPLA advance. We halted (23 B) just south of the Laager and waited for the 101 Bn Caspirs to show them their position in the combined laager.*

*2 Sept - Woke early and departed to the RSM,s echelon to collect rations. Turned north and left the vicinity of the Okavango river. Travel through large patches with burned out grass. The increasingly deep sand result in more and more vehicles got stuck.*

*3 Sept - Arrive in the laager at 05:30 and clean our Ratels. Went for a swim in a shallow stream. The water is muddy and dirty with ashes from the burnt-out banks. Puma helicopter brought fresh meat for a braai. I didn't eat much because I am feeling sick. We departed at 21:00. We are about 160 km south of Mavinga.*



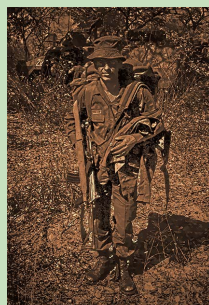
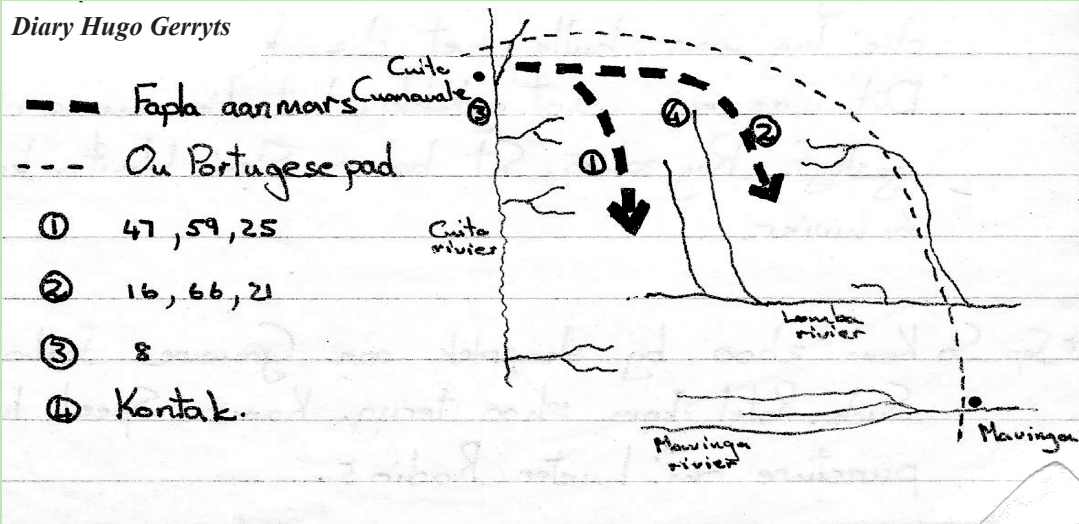




**On 3 September the situation on the front started flaring up. The SA 8 missile system with 21 Bde shot down one of our Bosbok reconnaissance aircraft. In the period of 4 to 6 September our artillery inflicted heavy casualties on 47 and 21 Brigades. They came to a halt, presumably awaiting bridge equipment and supplies.**



Diary Hugo Gerrys













***Diary Hugo Gerryts***

***4 Sept - Just after first light two Ratels and two Kwêvoëls got bogged down in one place. We reached our laager area and dug fox-holes for the first time. Went down to a river for a wash. We got a warning that 8 Migs are in the air. We learned later that day that they bombed a base at Mavinga. We continued at 20:00 and drove past various Unita camps.***



We commenced the advance on 5 September. About 10km north of Luenge we had to leave Ratel 22B behind. Our Tiffies did not have the necessary spares available for the repairs. We had a few options. We could abandon the vehicle for the 61 Mech echelon to recover it during the following day as they would follow on our tracks the following day. This was not a good option though with UNITA all over the place. I could also have sent it back with my recovery team, which would have left me with no recovery capability. The best solution was to leave the driver and gunner with the Ratel to be recovered the following day. I informed WO1 Kemp and we continued the advance at the maximum possible speed. We reached our hide south of Mavinga at 02:00. On 6 September RSM Kemp decided to follow a different route to the front, thus bypassing 22B altogether. They stayed there for a few days waiting for the recovery team.



*Dreyer van Niekerk recalls: "During the advance to Mavinga the hydraulic pipes of 22B ruptured and my gunner and I had to stay behind. The next day RSM Kemp would have recovered us. Unfortunately, the RSM got lost and it seemed that we were forgotten about. I really cannot remember how long we waited, but it was long enough without food and water. We were very glad when the Tiffies arrived and gave us food and water."*

### Anti-Tank Platoon Route



Once in Angola a lot of vehicle tracks confused some of the sub-sub units in the last part of the convoy. The anti-tank platoon after losing the general tracks followed a different route to Mavinga than the main force. They only linked up with the main force on Sunday 6 south of Mavinga.

*Theuns Cloete recalls: "We started with the advance on Monday. Our route was Leghoha – Lowengo – 100km to Kandombe – 20km to Longende – 30km to Kampembe – 50km to Mavinga. We got stuck a lot and sometimes had to connect 4 Ratels in series to get one Ratel out. We drove for long hours – day and night, with only short periods of sleep. On Sunday we were within 35km from Mavinga."*









*Diary Theuns Cloete*

*4 Sept – Arrived in the afternoon at Longende. We got bogged down several times. Advance through the night.*

*5 Sat – Arrive at Kampembe. The whole day in a camouflaged hide. Advance through the night to Mavinga.*

*6 Sun – In camouflaged hide. Drive through the night. We are still 35 km short of our rendezvous point.*

## Restructuring



On 4 and 5 September I had to attend a meeting at 20 Bde HQ. I left Bravo Coy behind under command of Chris Vorster. With a protection element, I departed to link up with a UNITA Officer at a predetermined rendezvous west of Mavinga. Fernando Aral Almeida was my interpreter. It was already dark when we met up with the officer. After a while, it seemed to me that he used the opportunity of a free ride to pay a visit to all his deployments. We drove through a few burnt-out positions. Apparently, there had been an airstrike earlier that day. After hours and no sign of the Bde HQ yet, I was getting increasingly agitated and through Fernando confronted the UNITA Officer. Then very shortly afterwards we arrived at 20 Brigade HQ.

The conclusion at the session was that there would be three combat groups. Combat Group A would consist of 61 Mech with Cmdt Smit in command, but without Bravo Coy and the ATk Pl. We became the 20 Bde Reserve. Henceforth we would be known as Combat Group C. Cmdt Hartsliet, commanding 32 Bn and 101 Bn, would form Combat Group B. Combat Group C would consist of Bravo Coy, the ATk Pl, an 81 mm Mortar fire group and a medical team.

The original decision was to give command of Combat Group C to Cmdt C. P. du Toit. I would then become his second in command. That was a sound decision from a tactical point of view. He was my senior by far and was combat group course qualified. I was only combat team course qualified. I however disputed this decision very strongly. I explained to Col Ferreira that Bravo Coy and the ATk Pl had been together since their arrival in December 1986 and that we were a closely-knit unit. Cmdt Smit supported my arguments. At the end of the discussion, my possessiveness about Bravo Coy and, I think, Cmdt Smit's persuasiveness, turned the decision in my favour.

I departed as a very happy Major. The newly established brigade reserve, CGp C had to assemble about 25km southeast of Mavinga, where the medical team



was awaiting our arrival. As we approached the area, a lone MiG (Russian fighter jet) appeared and bombed the area. A while later more MiG's appeared and brought down an intensive bombardment on the area. This forced CGp C to move into an assembly area more to the southwest of Mavinga.

*Dr George Scharf recalls: "I was part of the surgical team during Ops Modulêr. We were probably the first surgical team ever to deploy ahead of the BAA (Brigade Administrative Area) and axes of advance! One day we performed a tactical retreat. We were just into a temporary laager when a bomb from a lone MiG exploded about 800m west of us. That was when you joined us as rear-guard. You will remember that the doctors broke radio silence by asking where one another were. The one guy said: "We are about 800m directly east of where that bomb just exploded." We immediately bugged off and the MiG's came to bomb our previous position. We told that doctor off something seriously. He was nearly assaulted when he then naively remarked that "they don't understand Afrikaans", and I had to remind him that any German (pilot) would understand '800m east', etc."*





*Diary Hugo Gerryts*

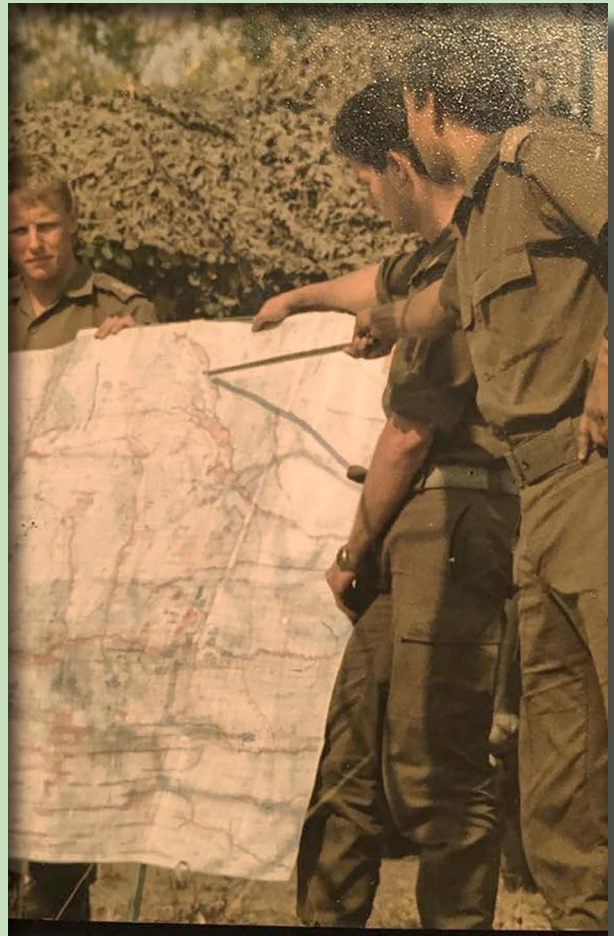
*6 Sept - Advance from 03:00 to 04:30. We learnt about the compilation of the Combat groups A,B,C. Attended church service. During the evening Cmdt Smit and Genl Meyer arrived by helicopter to address us. We learned that we will be moving to Pl 5 to take the place of 22B (still not caught up from Luenge). We were not happy. We were about 20 km south of Mavinga.*





*Diary Hugo Gerryts*

*7 Sept - Received order from Cmdt Smit. Unita can't stop the Fapla advance and we will go in to stop them. Went into a hide.*







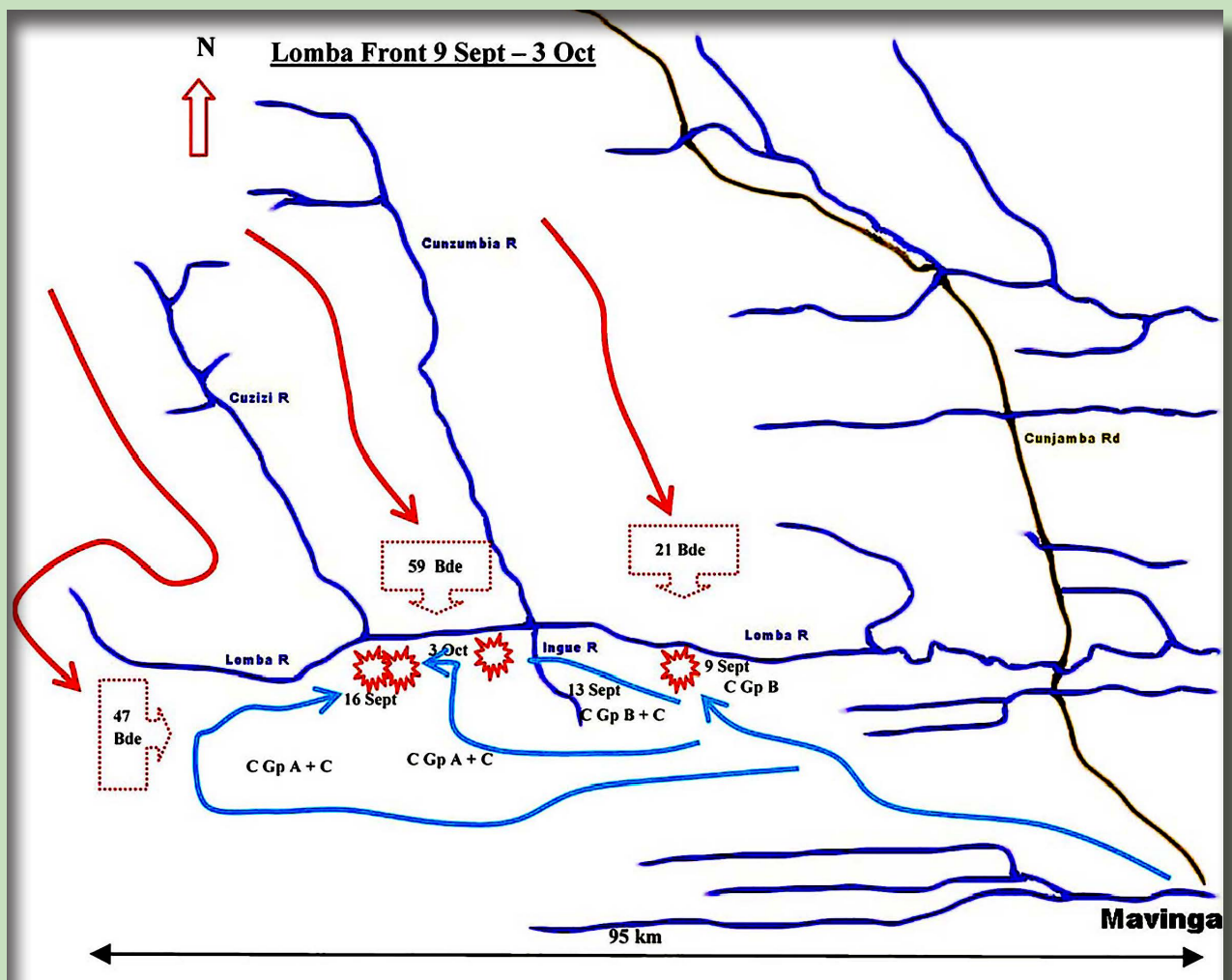
*Diary Hugo Gerrits*

*8 Sept - Soaking wet in my sleeping bag. Depart to anti-tank group 71 - placed on one hour standby. Move to a new laager. Cpl Swanevelder of to fetch canteen supplies and get lost. They arrived at midnight. Cloudy day. Own helicopter movement above. MRL and G5 firing sporadic salvos.*

*9 Sept - 23 B depart to Pl 5. Some of Pl 6 infantrymen allocated as ammo handlers to Ratel 90's. Depart 19:00 get stuck in the mud and went into a hide.*









## Prelude to 13 September



On 8 September, we joined up with CGp A about 10km southwest of Mavinga. This was a time for much needed vehicle maintenance and rest. On the front the FAPLA 21 Bde started to cross the Lomba River about 12km east of its confluence with the Cunzumbia. CGp B reacted with a motorized infantry company and an ATk group equipped with 90mm Ratels. Supported by Quebec battery, CGp B was able to delay the crossing and only one enemy company got across.

It was clear that 21 Bde was planning to cross the river with its tanks. Cmdt Hartsliet ordered Hannes Nortmann, with the remaining elements of the ATk squadron, to deploy to the area of the intended crossing. Nortmann arrived on the scene on the morning of 10 September. We as CGp C moved closer to the area to act as reserve and to strengthen CGp B, should it be necessary.

Meanwhile 21 Bde had established a bridgehead of battalion strength during the night, and the FAPLA tanks started to cross the river. They had to cross the mobile bridge in close formation. This exposed them to the concentrated fire of 20 Artillery Regiment. Nortmann engaged the individual vehicles crossing and 21 Bde lost its momentum. The southern bridgehead was successfully attacked by the infantry element of CGp B. 21 Bde was forced to abandon its efforts to cross the Lomba River and withdrew to the northern side of the river. During this contact Hannes destroyed two T55's (Soviet battle tanks) with his new ZU ATk missiles.





The waiting in anticipation was finally over. CGp C had to assist CGp B. We had to relieve Nortmann on this crossing to allow Cmdt Hartslief to consolidate his forces. Hartslief guided us in to the impact point. What a scene! It was like a battle movie on the Somme. There were shallow trenches everywhere, encircled by barbed wire. There was no uncertainty that this was the real thing. This was the front. We did not experience any contact and simply occupied the south bank.





***Diary Hugo Gerryts***

***10 Sept - Can hear MIGs bombing close by. Our position now north of Mavinga.***

***11 Sept - Heard 32 Bn shot out 3 tanks. Migs killed 49 Fapla own forces.***

***12 Sept - Departed west along the Lomba river, First light reached new hide. 12:00 took up position as the east flank protection. After dark return to our hide. Meet up with 32 Bn camo Ratels.***



***Diary Hugo Gerryts***

***13 September first light return to our east flank protection position. Advanced further west close to the tactical HQ. Many aircraft busy overhead. Our artillery Pre bombardment heard to the west. Heavy fighting as 32 Bn attacked the FAPLA force at the old Unita Log Base.***







## BRAVO - BATTLE PARTICIPATION CHRONOLOGICAL

Day Battle 13 September



With the FAPLA advance temporarily halted and their prospects of crossing the Lomba river becoming slimmer, the focal point moved west and closer to the source of the Lomba river.

East of this position, 47 Bde was already south of the Lomba. They had reached the confluence with the Cuzizi River where they started to prepare their positions. The Bde deployed its tactical group from its main position to about 4km to its east. This was an old UNITA logistical base. CGp B was instructed to attack this deployment on 12 September, to prevent 47 and 59 Bde's from linking up.

CGp C had to detach one of the ATk groups to CGp B for the attack. Logistical problems however prevented the intended CGp B attack on 12 September. The attack was postponed to 13 September. The detached ATk group from CGp C (72 – 2Lt Kooij) joined up with CGp B late in the afternoon of 12 September. CGp B moved out at about 07:00 on 13 September.

There was some disagreement between Hartsliet and UNITA about the correct position of the enemy. By clarifying this issue, Hartsliet realized that FAPLA was indeed in the old UNITA logistical base. This was not an ideal situation and the prospects did not appeal to Hartsliet.

*Johan Kooij recalls: "We left CGp C and joined up with CGp B. It felt strange to link up with another combat group. We were used to our own integrated formations that we rehearsed with Bravo Coy at Omuthiya. For us it was a drill. With CGp B having Ratel 90's, Casspirs (armoured personnel carriers) and Buffels (another type of armoured personnel carrier), it was not so easy to understand exactly what was expected of us. We also experienced sporadic loss of communications with Cmdt Hartsliet."*





The first phase of the attack was against entrenched FAPLA infantry. The FAPLA deployment forced Hartsliet to enter into a target area that favoured them more than his own force. FAPLA knew the terrain well, but to him it was unknown territory. The base stretched out for at least 2km in the bush line from east to west. He was forced to use the only access road, obviously under observation from FAPLA. There were very deep camouflaged bunkers, some with overhead cover constructed from tree logs. It would not take the weight of a vehicle passing over it. The danger was that the vehicle might disappear into the bunker, and then have to be recovered under enemy fire. The base was crisscrossed with trenches in all directions. There were many places for RPG attacks.

Hartsliet decided to enter the base under support fire from the 120mm mortars and to deploy on the inside. He deployed one infantry company on the command axis, which was the east-west road through the base. One ATK Gp was deployed to their left and one to their right. Hannes commanded the recovery vehicles and one infantry company deployed in depth.

They started the advance with support fire from the G5's and the 120mm mortars. About 500m into the target, they observed FAPLA infantry withdrawing to the north. He redeployed his depth element to face north to the bush line, on the edge of the Lomba floodplain. Then they engaged all movement in the direction



of the Lomba. With this deployment the FAPLA infantry retreat across the river became suicidal. They tried to escape westwards in the bush line. The leading 32 Bn infantry company turned their front to the north. By doing this, FAPLA was trapped in the bush line. More than 200 FAPLA soldiers were killed while, at that stage, Hartsliet had not encountered any losses to his own force.



*Rudi Nuyts recalls: "The 13th Sept was the first time we were involved in a real contact situation. I remember the intense anxiety and fear that I felt. As a driver (and maybe it applied to all of us) you only knew what was necessary for you to know. I never actually knew the 'bigger picture' or details of what was happening on the ground. Driving the Ratel was a full time job in itself. It was not easy to navigate my Ratel across the trenches. On the morning of 13 September, we (ATk Gp 72) were attached to 32 Bn, which consisted of Ratel 90's, Casspirs and Buffels. It was also our first encounter with enemy in trenches on that day. We were a superior force and the enemy suffered many casualties. Initially we encountered only infantry. I remember a FAPLA soldier sitting in a foxhole right in front of me."*



*My gunner was shooting at him with his turret machine gun. At a stage our Ratel was too close for the machine gun to dip any further, so I just drove over him."*

*"I observed how one of the 32 Bn gunners ripped an enemy soldier to pieces with his Casspir's mounted machine gun. I saw when the soldier stood up in his foxhole. His one hand was only hanging on a few sinews, while with each heartbeat the blood was spurting. A stream of bullets from the Casspir then ripped him to pieces. The FAPLA soldiers eventually tried to flee en masse. There were literally hundreds of them. They chose a very bad place to dig their trenches. It was in a semi-circled area, and they were with their backs to an open sjona (open, typically treeless, grassland). They tried to cross the sjona when they realized that they had no chance against us. They could only make very slow progress through the water and mud. As a result, we had quite an open target. I saw literally hundreds of them die that day."*



Up to that moment they encountered only infantry, exposed to their vastly superior firepower. CGp B seemed to be the victors. However, things started to change rapidly. As they progressed further west into the objective, they encountered more aggressive infantry. These started to fight back. During this fight,



two Ratel 90's got stuck in deep trenches. A third Ratel 90 tried to pull them out, when Tanks approached. The third Ratel disengaged and was stuck in the mire of the shona. All three the Ratels were now immobilized and very much at the mercy of the approaching tanks.



*Dawid Momberg recalls: "I remember we were integrated with 32 Bn Casspirs. Suddenly FAPLA infantry jumped up from their fox-holes and trenches and shot at us with heat strim grenades from their AK47's. Medic Doubell, with us in the Ratel, shot at them through the rear rifle port. I think it was both the first and last time that Cpl van Vuuren had the opportunity to throw hand grenades from the turret."*

Nortmann brought the recovery vehicles in, but he could not see the immobilized Ratels. At that stage, a tank with its turret facing backward was chasing a Casper, trying to ram it. This tank appeared through the thick bush about 100m from where Hannes was trying to find the immobilized Ratels. The T55 managed to get its canon to face the front and started firing. Own forces then engaged. They hit the tank, but it kept on moving. It took six more hits before its crew abandoned it.



Nortmann was still unable to find the stuck Ratels. He did find the Buffel of Franken and recovered it. He then found the Ratel that was stuck in the mire in the shona. It was burning fiercely. The blast of the exploding ammo inside the Ratel nearly hit Nortmann. At last, the stationary Ratels were also found. Their crews abandoned the Ratels, which explained why they did not throw smoke as Nortmann instructed them earlier. Some FAPLA infantrymen were scavenging inside the Ratels for ration packs. Nortmann engaged and killed them. He then recovered the Ratels with approaching tanks in very close proximity.







**Andrew Doubell recalls:” My First Day in the “Jumpseat” Of 72**  
We were informed that we were to be on loan to 32 Battalion to bolster their anti-tank capabilities. After the news broke, two emotions flooded through my brain. Firstly, why only us and not the rest of 61 Mechanized, coupled with a fear of the unknown that I have not experienced since then and secondly, a feeling of pride that we, with Johan Kooij at the helm, were chosen to support the renowned elite fighting unit of 32.

The mission started with me in the “jumpseat”, ready to pass 90mm rounds into the turret of the ratel if so required. I spent the first while leaning through to the front of the ratel, almost next to our driver Michael Pfeifer (R.I.P.), as this was the best vantage point to see what was going on, much better than the “skietgat ventstertjie” next to me. At some point Michael and myself spotted a tank at the same time as the other Anti-tank ratels with us, that is when I knew that this shit had just got real.

If I recall correctly, shots were fired by us and the other 72 Ratels, and the tank was taken out . We then continued forward and at some stage took light enemy fire from troops on the ground.



This was when I heard the calm voice of Johan Kooij from the turret "Medic vat jou fokken geweer en skiet, hulle is oorals" I can still remember the noise of the AK47 rounds hitting the side of the Ratel and at one stage one or two of the 32 men hitching a ride on our Ratel. Me, a conscript, in the safety of the beast, and the 32 guys picking off the enemy from the top of our ratel "min gespin".

Being in a command Ratel, we had the command network in one ear and our platoon network in the other. Suddenly a terrified voice came over the command network, " my luitenant is geskiet my luitenant is geskiet ".Kmdt Hartslief then asked him where his lieutenant was shot to which he replied in the head. Moments later the same gunner reported that they were stuck in the dry river bank (shona) and were under heavy tank fire to which Kmdt Hartslief replied " gooi rook, gooi rook, klim uit en hardloop boslyn toe". He then reports frantically that he has fired his smoke shield and that the tanks were still shooting at him when suddenly there was a deathly silence on the airwave.....

Hartslief learned that at least another six T55's were on their way (47 Bde Tactical Group). He withdrew his force from the objective - his CGp being subjected to far superior enemy firepower. His losses were one Ratel 90 and two Caspers destroyed.





*Rudi Nuyts recalls: "A T55 appeared through the thick bush to our left, without warning. Initially we (72 ATk Group with 4 Ratel 90's) were on our own, but we were soon joined by 32 Bn Ratel 90's. My gunner fired on the tank and it came to a halt about 100m in front of us. I believe that they were surprised and did not know where the fire was coming from, because they then fired a shot in a very wrong direction. What greatly terrified me was the long flame that came out of that barrel. My gunner as well as a 32 Bn Ratel engaged the tank. We fired many rounds. Initially the rounds did not seem to do much damage but at last the T55 crew started to abandon the tank. Between the two Ratel 90's we fired at least 30 rounds. If I remember correctly three or four more tanks were destroyed between 72 and 32Bn."*



*Jaco Swanevelder recalls: "I strongly believe that the presence of ATk Gp 72 that morning made a significant difference to the outcome of the morning's battle. I am convinced that we prevented bigger losses. Later in Modular, Hannes Nortmann presented each ATk leader with a set of 32 Bn camo's and declared that we were honorary members of 32 Bn."*







## Night Battle 13 September



At about 16:00, CGp C received orders from Bde HQ to advance to the target, which was evacuated by CGp B. My instructions were to recover the own forces' abandoned vehicles and to destroy those which could not be recovered. Bde HQ gave me the assurance that the enemy vacated the target. Some UNITA officers were of the same opinion. I did find it strange that FAPLA withdrew from the target area. Only an hour prior, CGp B withdrew due to confirmed information of the approach of at least six tanks, part of the 47 Bde Tactical Group. In addition, with a tactical group there must have been some other heavy elements as well. And then, a few hours afterwards, with darkness approaching, the enemy had allegedly vacated the area? Highly questionable!

ATk Gp 72, who participated in the morning attack, returned to my command for this venture. This created a challenge, because 72 were in critical need of fuel and ammunition and the echelon was at least 45 minutes behind. Ben Smit responded immediately. It was already past 17:00 when the replenishment was completed. I could not form a clear picture of what to expect in the target area. Johan Kooij could only recall a very basic picture of the first km or so into the target, as he observed it that morning. Then the T55's entered the scene. With such a threat one fights for survival, there was no time for sightseeing. From then on he concentrated on the enemy, not on terrain.

Nortmann, in his effort to locate the stuck 32 Bn Ratels during the morning attack, was the best informed about the approximate location of the vehicles that we were supposed to either recover or destroy (2 Caspers to recover and another two to destroy). He was to become our guide. By this time there was no doubt that we were facing a very fragile night operation. I became very concerned about the lack of illumination bombs for my 60mm conventional mortars, carried by Pl 6. It was clear that I could not rely on any artillery support. Due to the morning's fighting, 20 Bde's indirect fire support capability was either busy redeploying or busy replenishing. Should they even have been in a position to render support, they would not have been able to do so. There was no forward observer allocated to CGp C. I expressed my concerns to 20 Bde HQ, but bad interference on the radio made it impossible to communicate clearly. I had to move!

We moved out to the target and reached the entrance to the Log Base about 19:00. As I was deploying my forces inside of the gate in combat element formation, a UNITA soldier approached the UNITA Liaison officer on my vehicle. They both wanted to know how I intend to deal with the tank ambush. This did



not come as a shock to me, since we all knew or should have known that CGp B withdrew under exactly that threat during the day fight. It was an unpleasant confirmation of known facts. A night fight now finally became inevitable.



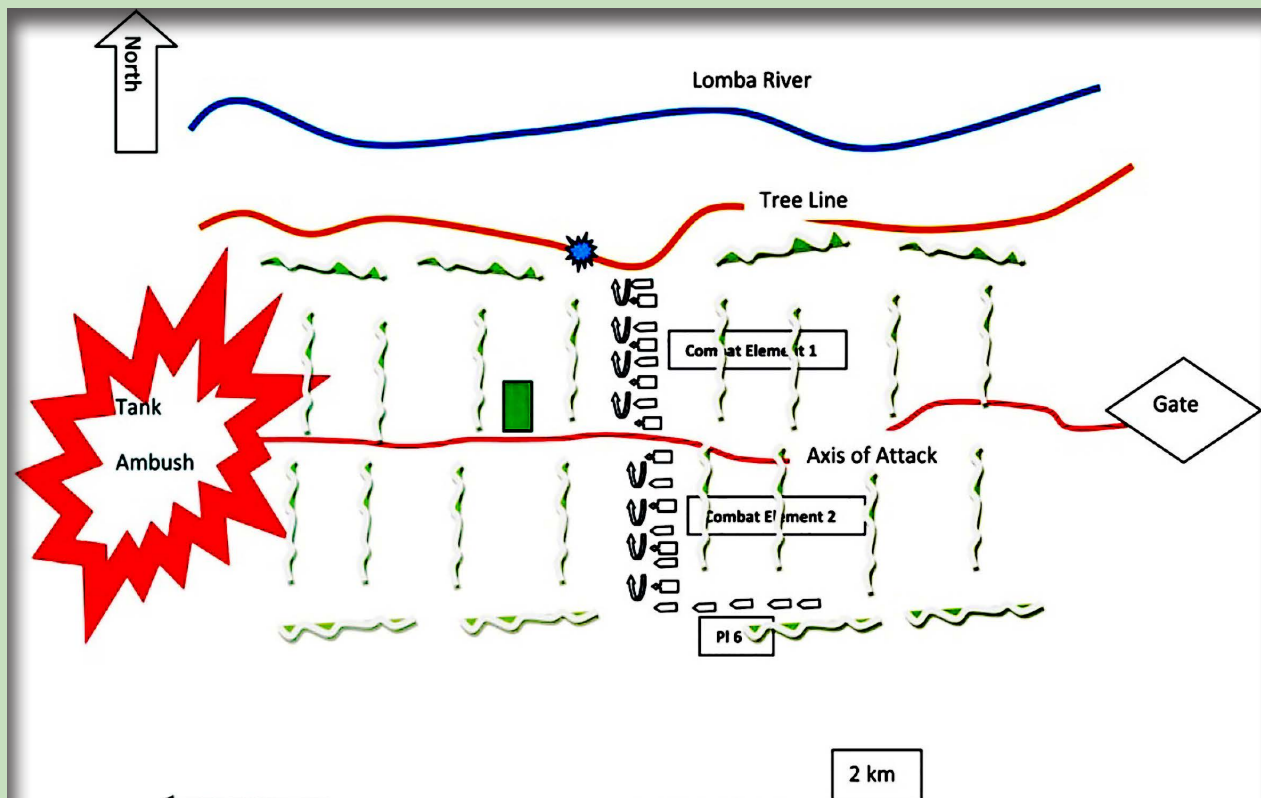
I had little choice on my command axis. It had to be the east-west road through the base. It was the only option. Combat Element 2 (72 and 22), were to deploy integrated on the left i.e. south of the command axis while Combat Element 1 (71 and 21) were to deploy integrated on the right of the axis i.e. north of the axis with their right boundary the tree line of the Lomba floodplain. This gave me a very broad front of 16 Ratels. I deployed Pl 6, with the conventional base plate 60mm mortars, to the south. Their task was to act as my flank force, preventing FAPLA from enveloping my southern flank. They were also my main source of illumination.

With the T55 threat and rapidly increasing darkness, I instructed the infantry to debus and walk between the Ratels. This was the right thing to do considering the dense terrain, the darkness, the trenches, and the pending tank ambush. My own lessons learnt during Ops Askari proved that infantry is less vulnerable on the ground than in the Ratel. One well aimed T55 round can wipe out a section



in a Ratel in seconds. Furthermore, it is the classic role of infantry to protect the armour – in this case all the Ratels, and especially the Ratel 90's.

We started a slow but cautious advance. Later reconstruction of the night combat proved that we only moved 1800m over the next three hours. That was about 10 meters per minute. I instructed the 60mm mortars to be very stingy in the use of their illumination rounds. It was very dark, and it was a reasonable pace for infantry on foot given the circumstances. About halfway through the target, I could clearly see the glow of the unfortunate Ratel from the attack that morning. I made that observation near a kind of parade ground with a bush pavilion on my command axis. Bde HQ increasingly became a nuisance - being constantly on the radio and chasing me up. At a certain stage I just confirmed reception, but I was going to do it my way, and in the most effective manner that the given circumstances allowed me to do. After all, they ordered this potentially suicidal mission, not me.



My command Ratel was not equipped with radio installations to facilitate my new role as a combat group commander. I had to use man pack radios for my rear link. I had to set priorities for the communications and obviously it was to fight the battle, not to give a running commentary to 20 Bde HQ.

At that stage some of my elements were experiencing seriously increasing difficulty with visibility. Losing command cohesion became a real possibility. My ability to try to construct a visual image in my head on the specific position of



my 16 Ratels on a broad front became overstretched. I only knew that some Ratels were stuck and that their reference on their position relative to the command axis became ambiguous.

I had to restore their orientation, or lose command and control. I instructed the torching of the huts and structures next to the command axis. The risk was that the fire would silhouette us. This to me was a small price to pay for regaining command and control. It was not the best thing to do; it was the only thing to do. If CGp B got totally disorientated during the morning attack, in broad daylight, even more so the potential for chaos that night. Only two Caspers were recovered at that stage. It was about 23:00.

*Jaco Swanevelder recalls: "Our slow pace was due to the lack of illumination rounds, the dense bush and the many huts and trenches that had to be checked as we advanced. By 22:00, out of exasperation, Lotter ordered that the huts along his command axis be torched to establish a reference point for his elements on the front. At that stage only two of the missing Casspirs had been recovered, while two were still somewhere out there in the darkness.*

*Then FAPLA opened fire on Combat Element 1, with eight tanks engaging. This resulted in chaos. The situation deteriorated when the commander of Combat Element 1 lost all forms of communication. All the vehicles in this column turned their radios back to Lotter's command radio, jamming up an already over-stretched system.*

*Lotter then ordered Lt Kooij, commanding the left hand column, to move up and take control, while he struggled to bring order out of the overall chaos. Kooij engaged the T55's. These actions restored order and allowed Lotter to gain control. FAPLA engaged with BM 21 rockets, being fired from across the river. Lotter gained approval to withdraw. A number of tanks started manoeuvring around his southern flank.*

*With the six remaining, active Ratel 90's, Kooij effectively covered the CGp C attempt to retreat. Lotter started pulling his force back in 100 meter bounds. At the end of each bound, control points were established to account for all. It was however impossible to make a clean break away. As his force retreated, FAPLA followed in pursuit. That meant that Kooij had to re-engage. FAPLA ceased pursuing the disengaging force at 02:00, for unknown reasons. A clean breakaway could at last be achieved."*





*Wayne Bruwer recalls: "On the evening of 13 September 1987, we were trying to avoid driving into trenches or ditches. Light was very poor. Andrew Doubell (71 medic) and I (72 signaller) left our respective vehicles and were guiding our vehicles backwards. I remember hearing a very loud whooshing sound over my head, followed by automatic gunfire. Someone, presumably 2Lt Anton Pretorius, was shouting at us to get inside. There was no time to think or be afraid; the goal was simply to get inside the Ratel."*

*I believe that the "whoosh" sound was from a Soviet multiple rocket launcher (Stalin Organ). Maybe it sounds dramatic, but for many years after that day, I perceive 13/09/1987 as my new birthday. As we got inside the Ratel events developed rapidly. We experienced continuous stoppages on both our turret machine gun and the 90mm canon. Willemse (72 gunner) was not a happy man. Then Cornie got injured and we transferred him to our vehicle."*





*Dawid Momberg recalls: "We (72) were detached to 32 Bn for the attack that morning but went back to join up with CGp C for the recovery exercise. I will never forget how fed up we were after the morning's battle alongside 32Bn - and then had to go back with CGp C that same night! We survived, but it was far better to fight that morning, in daylight, than in the dark later that night."*

*Cornie Botes recalls: "The mortars could not provide enough illumination. We met an obstacle in the form of a trench and 71 had to breach it. I crossed first, followed by Jaco Swanevelder. In the process, we had to turn our Ratels around and cross the trench in reverse. We were waiting for Theuns and Anton to come into place, when the flair went up. Then all hell broke loose. A bullet hit me in the forehead through my headset. It was just blood all over my face. The blood clogged the radio mouthpiece. Herkie and Smittie did not have an intercom facility and we had to shout at each other."*





*Barry Snyman recalls: "We accompanied Bravo Coy to go and recover 101Bn Casspirs, trapped in bomb craters. It was totally 'crazy' and unrealistic. We were crawling along when all hell broke loose. We were directly behind 20. We were all sitting on top of 28 and I must admit I was not even a little afraid at that moment. That was all to change soon enough. Everything looked like a movie show. It did not seem real. There was tracer fire going in all directions. The 81mm mortars were lighting up the sky, making it look like daylight.*

*Somewhere some maniac from 32Bn or 101Bn went on a recon amongst the enemy and came back to report positions of enemy equipment. Then the Ratel 20mm tracers hit the tanks and shot straight up. The Ratel 90's then moved in and did their thing. It was only when a BM 21 got hit, and the rockets started going off, that we seemed to grasp reality. A rocket passed somewhere overhead and it felt very, very close. We all dived inside the hatches. I remember feeling as sick as a dog when we finally returned sometime later. My nerves were shattered."*





*Theuns Cloete recalls: "We went in to clear up around 17:30. The further we went in the more dead bodies and stuff we see, with the smell of hair and flesh burning. UNITA said that there was an ambush with 8 tanks and lots of infantry. Around 22:00 we drew lots of fire. They were shooting at us with tanks and missiles (Stalin Organ elevated to ground level). We returned fire but ran out of illumination mortars and could not see well anymore. We drew a lot of fire and the infantry started withdrawing, while we remained behind. When they had completely withdrawn we also left. We drove back a bit and waited for the recovery to lift two Caspers. We drove further afterwards and went to sleep approximately 20km from there."*

*Warren Sheridan recalls: "I was running in front of the vehicle so we could get back to the boys fast when that f\_cking Stalin Organ went off. During training I hit the ground with speed, but nothing in comparison to that night."*





*Willem Grobler Recalls: "I was the number one of the Mag machine gun in Ratel 22B. We moved by foot next to the Ratels for a long time until we reached the end of the target area where we halted. We waited for the command to withdraw but 32 Bn was still searching the objective to find their lost vehicles from the day fight. I saw to my front a red light burning and reported it to Cpl van Rensburg. We waited about 30 minutes for an answer. Then Cpl van Rensburg enquired from us if the red light was still there. I answered affirmative. Then he gave a firing order: "LMG1 One volley deliberate fire, 300 meter red light - READY - Ready - Fire.".*

*Due to the sparks and sound of solid hits and ricochets where my fire hit, it was obvious that I struck metal. Then I received the second firing command and as I fired away there was movement and slight chaos on my target. We could see other dark solid shapes, and then we saw it clearly - a BM21. It opened fire and its projectiles travelled low over our heads. I suppose the tubes couldn't decline lower. Almost simultaneously about six T55 tanks opened fire as well. I Am convinced that my LMG fire forced the enemy ambush to be activated and save Bravo from an enemy envelopment. "*



*Diary Hugo Gerryts*

*We formed up for an attack on the same objective. Strong dusk we enter the objective. Movement very difficult. Many bunkers and foxholes. Units to our front withdrew and report a Fapla tank ambush at the west side of the objective. Infantry on foot move with the anti tank Ratels while the Ratel 20's about 100 to our rear followed. Reach trenches too wide to cross. I move to the trench to show 71 the best place to cross. Move to the right to form formation again. We were just about finish when FAPLA opened fire. As one all the anti tank ratels opened fire.*

*Cpl Botes sent contact report. He is bleeding. The tanks aim just short of their Ratels and shower them in shrapnell. BM 21's opening up in the ground role. Projectiles travel through our lines. My voice doesn't sound normal. I am very jittery. Our Ratel reversed into a trench and got stuck. After a while we managed to escape from the trench. Lt Pretorius sustained a injury on his arm as it got caught in the recoil of his 90mm canon. We stayed at the front while the infantry retreat. Kooi is the last to withdraw. At last we withdrew from the objective.*







**Jaco Swanevelder recalls: “That night we applied the ‘backside first’ trench crossing. The main problem was that there were still one or two 90’s with their rear ends pointing towards the enemy, when they started shooting at us. That, and struggling with communications, made our lives fairly difficult. My Ratel also got semi-stuck in a bunker after they started shooting at us. Piet Pieterse, my gunner, jumped out under a hail of bullets to get 71C to come and give us a little nudge. After the first fright and the chaos, with Anton’s arm caught by the recoil and Botes who was shot in the head, I was quite surprised at how calm the crews of the six resisting 90’s were.”**

**At last, I could disengage from the fight. We drove back eastwards on a track that, from time to time, was clearly visible from the Lomba north bank. We travelled about 4km on this track before we turned due south. We had to continue for a few kilometres. We drove until we found some area with relatively adequate vegetation to conceal us from the air. Only then did I have the time to construct a clear picture of the situation. No fatalities and everyone accounted for!**











## Reflections



During my first conventional exposure in Ops Askari 1983/84 my company (A) was detached to form part of Combat Group Delta. There I was subjected to ill-considered instructions. I saw myself as very privileged to participate in Ops Modular as combat team/group commander.

This exposure during Modular resulted in me subjecting all instructions to a logical examination in my mind. (Except for the occasions where I went into battle with Cmdt Smit!) I did not expect Bde HQ to be perfect. They just had to understand the war. What would have happened that night if I just stormed in like they required? CGp B already received a hiding the same morning. They would not have been able to react. CGP A was too far away to provide us with support. In my opinion, if we were pinned that night, the history of the war would have read differently today.

It was expected of me to recover a couple of burnt out, stranded vehicles from the target area - without indirect fire support and without sufficient illumination. This was due to a senseless policy from the hierarchy that no RSA equipment could end up in the hands of the enemy. They were willing to risk more lives regardless of the losses of that morning's attack. We moved in close to dusk and deployed inside the Log base, to search for what, in the dark? Bde HQ expected me to storm in. I did not. It took nearly four hours to move less than 2km in the dark of night. I was busy just about an hour when Bde HQ started bothering me about speed. They could not guarantee me any support, just orders to rush! Bde HQ made the rules. At dusk, when I wanted answers about support, all of a sudden the radio communications were very unclear. However, when they wanted to force down the impossible on you, the communications were excellent. So, the rule was – you listened to the radio when it suited you. I also applied that rule - I heard nothing if I did not want to hear it.

Two things saved us that night. FAPLA did not think we would be able to cross those last deep trenches. It was probably their plan to push us up against the trenches by means of the tank flanking movement from the south. However, when we started crossing the trenches they had to activate the ambush. They also did not expect such a wide front (16 Ratels: 8 x 90's and 8 x 20's).















































## Planning for 16 September



During the day of 14 September, we were forced to hide in very unfavourable terrain. The Angolan air force was very active. Most vegetation was just ashes. Therefore, the open laager was spread over a large area. During that night, we moved to a more suitable spot, but our tracks were obviously picked up from the air. The next morning as I approached the Ratel of Johan Kooij to congratulate him on his 20th birthday, we received a farewell gift from FAPLA. Some MiGs carried out an airstrike on an area less than 1km away.



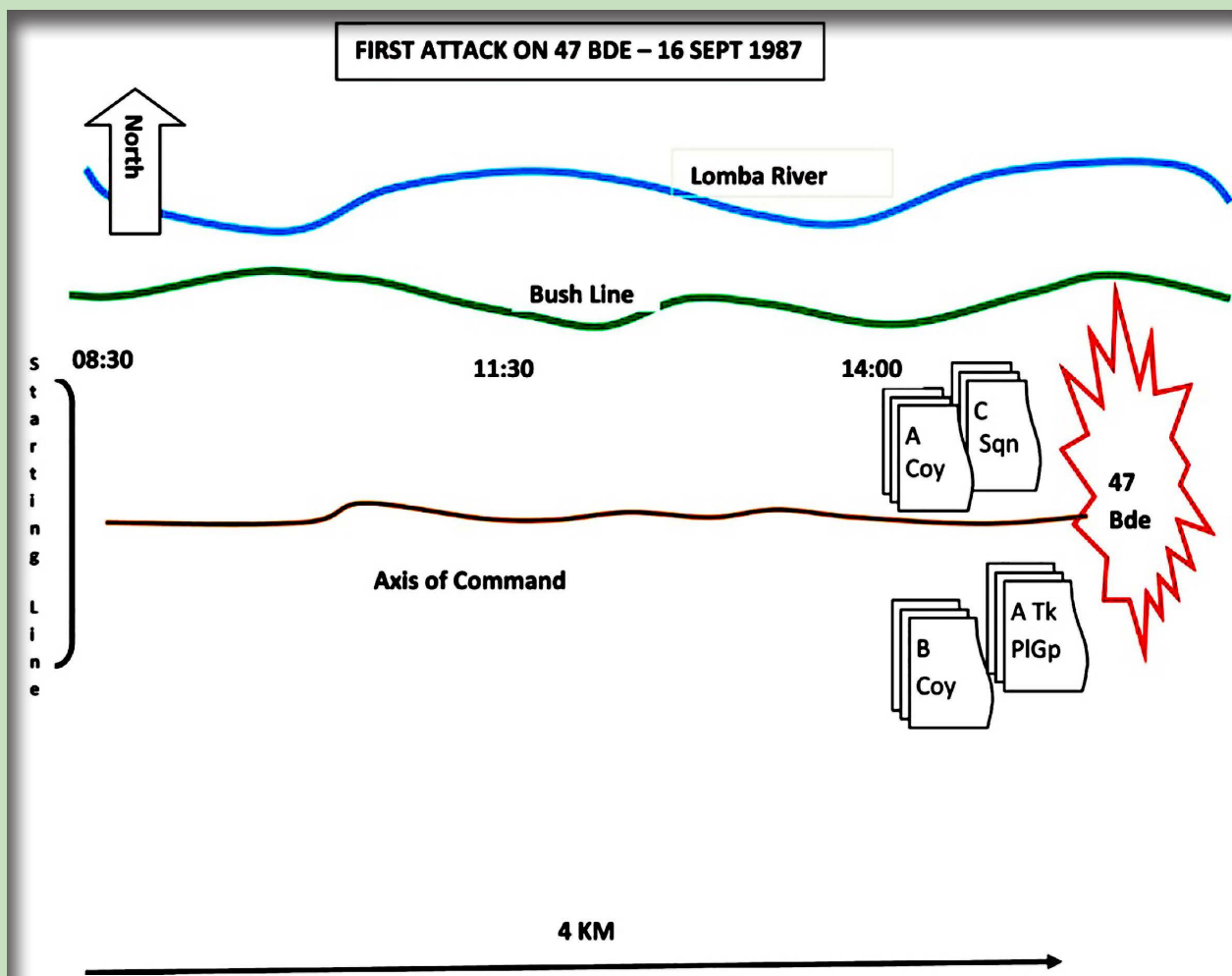


## Attack on FAPLA 47 Bde - 16 September



We were still recovering from the night attack on 13 September when I learned about the intended attack on 47 Bde scheduled for 16 September.

CGp A and CGp C were to advance on a broad front from the west. About mid-day on 15 September we (CGp C) moved back to CGp A to plan for the attack. By then our knowledge about the FAPLA Bde movements was more accurate than during the 13 September attacks. Cmdt Smit detailed his plan and we plot the plan on our maps accordingly. His plan stipulated a broad front attack with CGp A to the north and CGp C to the south. The concept was that CGp A would first make contact on the left flank. Pending the accuracy of this, CGp C would then serve as the southern flank. Another option would have been for CGp C to swing north to execute a flank attack, or to act as a direct fire support base.







*John McCrum recalls: “It was still dark when we got our orders and moved out to our start line. I filled my combat jacket and chest webbing with as many magazines as I could; I used my chest webbing as a bullet proof vest. By the time I was finished I could barely lift up my webbing, I had to put it on the Ratel step to get it on, I estimate it must have weighted in the region of 25 – 30 kg. I didn’t want to run out of Ammo or grenades during the fight”.*

CGp C was in the lead. We started at 05:00 on 16 September, from an assembly area about 9km south of the Lomba, advancing in a westerly direction. After about 15km we turned north and then east again in line with the source of the Lomba. This last leg was also to be our axis of attack. Our air force started bombing 47 Bde early that morning. Just as we started the eastern advance, we were rocketed by our own air force. They suddenly approached from the east, without any warning. Due to the sharp sunlight in our eyes we could only detect them at the last moment. They dived and attacked us with rockets. We did not anticipate an air attack from the enemy with so many of our own planes in the air. My gunner, Karel Koen saw them first and shouted “MiGs”. Then I saw them diving. Luckily, they were off target and the salvo exploded about 100m parallel to our north. They must have realized their mistake, because they dis-



appeared without any further rocketing. We were unharmed, but the incident was unnerving and had the smell of a bad omen.

*John McCrum recalls: "Without warning two dark shapes appeared in the sky and pretty soon the call went up "victor victor" and everybody clambered back into their vehicles. The sound of the explosions was pretty loud accompanied by the sound of shrapnel pinging off the side of the Ratel. Fortunately, nobody was injured and none of the vehicles were badly damaged, we found some marks on the side of our ratel and the flap covering the water tap had been blown off. It was actually two of our own Buccaneers who had mistaken us for a FAPLA convoy."*



We crossed the starting line at about 08:30. Our battlefield surveillance was not good. We did not know exactly where the FAPLA first deployments were. Due to the dense vegetation and the confirmed proximity of T55's, we were forced to let the infantry debus prematurely. I think it was about 4km west of the confirmed FAPLA deployments. Our progress was extremely slow because the Ratels had to adjust their speed to that of the debussed infantry. The movement on foot demanded a great deal of endurance from the infantry. Initially they did mutual movement, but as we progressed and fatigue set in, they just moved between the



**Ratels. It took about five hours to complete the distance of 4km. Due to the wide front of our deployment of more than 20 Ratels, control became problematic. At one point, CGp A would move into the fire arches of CGp C and vice versa.**





We came under indirect fire at about 11:30. As we progressed the intensity of mortar fire on us increased. FAPLA observers obviously did not have clear observation on us, because a lot of the mortar fire exploded behind the front line, and made things difficult for the HQ element. This indicated that we had to adjust our advance more to the northeast. Our own 120mm mortars started engaging targets in the 47 Bde position.



*John McCrum recalls: Platoon 6 was on the right flank of the attack; we all sat quietly in the back of the Ratel in anticipation of the battle to come. Eventually after a couple of hours of slowly creeping through the thick Angolan bush the order eventually came 'Stop, Sta-puit'. After we'd de-bused we followed our training and began firing and moving, after about a kilometre in the hot late morning sun the weight of the heavy webbing began to take its toll. I got Torrani to open the Ratel door and I dumped the chest webbing inside. The Ratels were following behind the infantry, we in turn followed the anti-tank platoon. Leaves from the trees above my head began to flutter to the ground; small puffs of sand could be seen on the ground around us and above the shouts, radio traffic and explosion, I could vaguely hear the 'crack & thump' of small arms fire. It wasn't until someone shouted 'contact' that I realised that we were being fired upon, we all hit the deck and began advancing via fire and move.*



The same limitations hindering FAPLA were equally limiting to our own observers. CGp A on the left flank made first contact with FAPLA in trenches north of the command axis. They also received most of the FAPLA indirect fire. It was easier for FAPLA to drop mortars just on the bush line, which they knew we would use for navigation. We started drawing direct fire at about 14:00 when the left flank started engaging heavy infantry and T55's.



On the right flank, CGp C made contact. Suddenly we were among trenches and the enemy. Due to our rigid formation linked to CGp A, I could not manoeuvre my force. The situation became very dangerous. However, the potentially volatile situation on the left flank shortened my dilemma. Cmdt Smit gave the command to pull back. CGp C had to hold the front a little bit longer to allow CGp A to disengage. They fell back and consolidated about 2km to the west. We pulled back in combat formation from firm base to firm base to ensure that FAPLA did not put up a chase. I was instructed to mark the route for a second attack, probably that same night.

Our retreat was covered by white phosphorus 120mm mortar fire. After a brief period of intense unease about the night attack, Cmdt Smit convinced Bde HQ that it was not a good idea. We were supposed to attack again the following morning. However, that attack was cancelled.





#### *Hugo Gerryts Diary*

*Couldn't sleep. At 01h30 we received order we were going to attack 47th Brigade. Air strike before 61 Mech attack. Refuelled vehicles and left at 4h30. Van Der Westhuizen rode with us and 89. Greenway moved to 23. Stopped at 6h45 in a shona for a comfort break. As we climbed back in and door closed we saw a buccaneer very low overhead and we came under fire from it. We drove as quickly as possible into treeline for cover.*

*When safe to do so, we carried on with advance. We heard bombs falling on the target. Deployed into formations and troops "step Out". Bush was very dense. Walked far, we then got back in ratel and moved to another place and debussed, and started advancing again. It was all very confusing for troops on ground.*

*Alpha company to left of us engaged enemy. Due to rough terrain and thick bush, the ends of column moved quicker and a "U" formation occurred and we ended up in each others firing line. The round cracking over my head brought out a fear in me. Vehicles pulled back. Our section pulled back after the others.*

*At 16h00 we left and moved into a laager. We heard A company lost someone. At dawn we moved with aim to refuel and replenish ammo. Fell asleep on top of Ratel,*



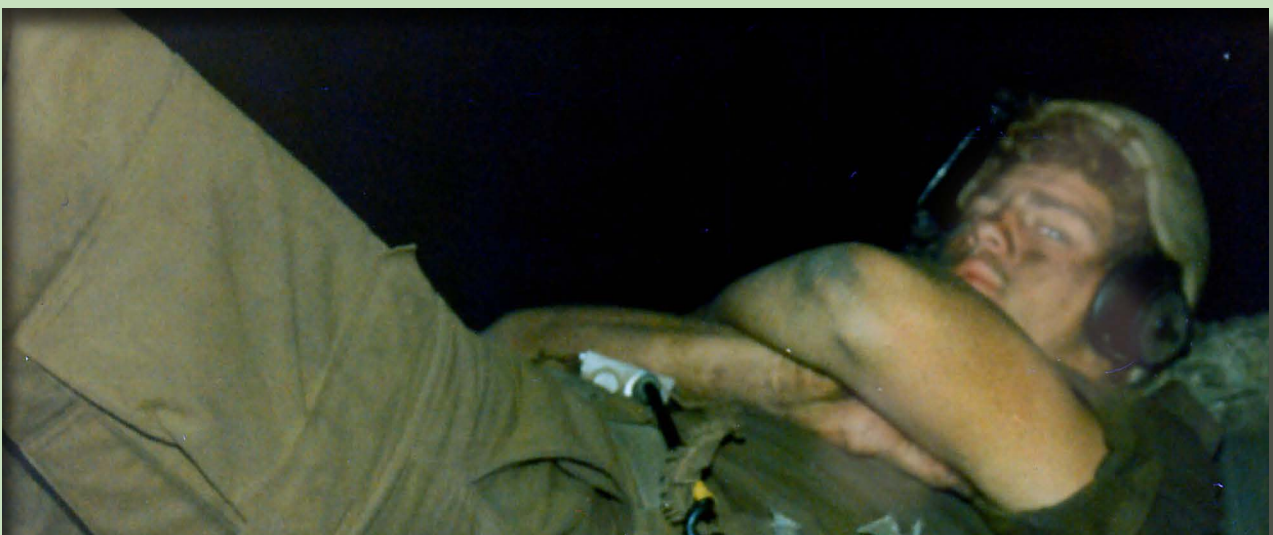


*John McCrum recalls: The attack hadn't gone as planned; we hadn't met the enemy head on we had gone in at an angle and our right flank had made contact with enemy first. Command was worried about a FAPLA counter-attack around our flank, so our attack was halted so that we could withdraw and straighten up our line of advance. With all the noise of the battle and the LMG group (Me, Oosie and Danie) being further away from the Corporal, we didn't hear the command to 'stuit en ontrek'. It was only when I looked around to see how the attack was progressing, I noticed we were 50 – 100m in front of everybody else and they were withdrawing. We were still under enemy small arms and artillery fire. Once we had withdrawn far enough the Ratels were ordered forward to deliver fire to the front while we climbed in and pulled back.*





*Theuns Cloete recalls: "The pre bombardment started 06h15 when 6 Mirage, 2 Baccaneers and 2 Canberras came in and bombed the place. When they were done, MLV and G5 fired. We then entered from a westerly direction. In the afternoon around 16h00, after a lot of searching for the enemy, we made contact. By this time we were already in the enemy's positions and they started shooting at us from all sides. 1 Ratel was hit from the front by an RPG 7. Three guys were seriously injured and one was killed. We pulled back because we did not know what the enemy had in store for us. We stopped and withdrew with a lot of artillery and mortar fire on us. We then went back to our old shelter".*









## Interlude - 17 September to 2 October



By 18 September CGp C had moved to a position closer to CGp B, to be able to support them on short notice. Our artillery dominated the fighting during the ensuing days.

The intended deployments of the FAPLA Bde's were uncertain and necessitated a constant state of alertness. On 20 September a number of air force strikes went in on 47 Bde. By 21 September 47 Bde was isolated and desperately running short of supplies. 47 Bde tried until 26 September to establish a crossing on the Lomba. They had the TMM bridge for the task, but could only get it in place once they managed to establish a tree stump road across the floodplain.

This needed to be established on both the northern and southern banks of the Lomba - a combined distance of about 1.4km. By 28 September, their efforts were unsuccessful. They were ordered to move eastwards with all possible speed. On 2 October, advance elements of 47 Bde reached a point opposite the confluence of the Cuzizi with the Lomba. They were now in less favourable terrain than on 16 September. For us, this made a second attack on 47 Bde practicable.







***Diary Hugo Gerryts***

***17 Sept - The hydraulic pipe of our Ratel broke. Waited to 05:00 before being recovered. Got fresh meat and potatoes.***

***18 Sept - Fresh water replenishment. 23 A breakdown. 23 C and 23 tried to tow it unsuccessful. Gone to sleep 03:00. 2Lt van Wyk cross because we did not dig foxholes.***

**TO EVERY FOX HIS OWN HOLE**

**In a hole in the sand is where I take cover  
A hole I'd exchange for nothing other  
As mortar bombs down upon me rain  
And I feel the blasts again and again**

**Where will the next bomb fall I muse  
Right or left or a hole in one  
In my hole, my sweat profuse  
Death measured in metres or rule of thumb**

**Then the fire lifts to somewhere far away  
Death has again passed me by this day  
Nearly seeing my arse for months on end  
My soul and being into tiredness descend**

**From hole to hole I count off each day  
Just nine more weeks of trial still ahead  
Until the Flossie comes to take me away  
And then from war I myself can shed**

**© Dawid Lotter  
Into English by Genl Tony Savides.**



**Diary Hugo Gerryts**

**19 Sept - Visit the echelon to replenish. Return to our hide. Everyone is talking about siwwie street since today we were supposed to go on leave. 14:00 - 16:00. Foot patrol around the hide. Aircraft heard in the distance. After last light we went into a closed laager. Ratel engines cleaned with a pressure washer. Guard duty at Majors Ratel 20. Major getting cross with too many idle chatter on the internal radio net.**

**20 Sept - Listen to Radio 5. Attending church service. UNITA attacking the FAPLA supply convoys shot down one of their helicopters. Lot of own and enemy activity overhead. Receive our first mail since we crossed the border into Angola. Section 23 A to be detached to platoon 5. One of our G5 cannons experienced a barrel burst. One person dead. It's raining heavily during the night.**



**Diary Hugo Gerryts**

**21 Sept - Our Luit said that we are now in depth. Drive 4,5 km to a new hide. A member from one of our other units got lost and came to our hide.**

**22 Sept - Rainy weather. Artillery bombardments all around. A team is sent to the shona to dig waterholes.**

**23 Sept - Some go to wash in the dirty muddy waterholes.**

**Diary Hugo Gerryts**

**24 Sept - Ordergroup. Fresh rations and post.**

**25 Sept - Stand guard at Ratel 20.**

**26 Sept - Orders at Major's Ratel. Shower. Listen Currie Cup. N Tvl win Transvaal 24/18.**

**27 Sept - Church parade. Our Artillery very active.**

**28 Sept - A Mirage hit by FAPLA, reached Rundu and crash land. Commanders depart for recoinacence.**

**29 Sept - Vehicle commanders do planning at A Coy position.**

**30 Sept - Hear our bombardments on 47 FAPLA Brigade. Escort 81 mm mortars.**



## Defeating 47 Brigade - 3 October



On 30 September, it was clear that the FAPLA advance had been stopped. However, their capability to renew their initial objective – the occupation of Mavinga – was not broken. Our tactical objective – stop FAPLA, had been achieved. The strategic and political aims were not. Should we have left Angola at that critical stage, there was no way that UNITA could have coped. The operation had to continue.

## Reconnaissance for the Attack



Cmdt Smit anticipated that our next attack on 47 Bde would be from the east, along the south bank of the Lomba. In preparation for this, the leader groups of CGp A and CGp C reconnoitred the possible advance axes on 28 September. We started at the old UNITA log base. We drove in and switched off the vehicles. Everybody walked around in the base freely. My people wandered too far away from the vehicles to my liking. Contrary to Cmdt Smit's instruction, I ordered my driver to start up the vehicle and to drive closer to where my people were. The other groups were widely dispersed in the trenches.

My sixth sense warned me that we were heading for some trouble. As I reached my group the first mortars from the north bank of the Lomba exploded very close to my vehicle. I picked my people up and took them out of the target area. The other groups, especially A Coy, were not so lucky and had to run far to get to their vehicles. About 15 minutes later the MiGs bombed the area. I was not very popular with the others. They claimed it was prematurely starting my vehicle that brought the mortars and MiG's in.

*Duncan B Taylor (C Sqn) recalls: "We walked around the area with little concern about who was watching us, until the bombs started falling. We crawled through the trenches for ages and eventually I came to a dead end. There I found a senior officer. We finally came to a decision and made a mad dash for the Ratels, which were all under cover beneath the trees further back."*



*Len Robberts (C Sqn) recalls: "On 28 September we (0B, 20, 72, 30, 13 and 13C) performed a recce of the UNITA log base. There was a shot-out T54 tank near the edge of the sjona. We went to the tank and I took a group photo of the guys on the tank. It was just after a photo of me on the tank was taken that all hell broke loose around us. The enemy across the shona must have seen us and started shelling us. The mortars fell all around us and it resulted in a process of running, diving into the ground, WHAMMMM...WHAMMMM, as the mortars exploded, getting up, running, diving into the ground..."*



We did not continue our reconnaissance that day. We went back a day or two later to about four km to the west of the UNITA log base (the attacks on 13 September) to determine possible killing areas, should 47 Bde continued to advance east. We identified two ideal places. We rehearsed on foot a few possible scenarios. As C Sqn did not have any action up to now, it would be their baptism of fire. It became clear that the terrain dictated that the navigation would be on the bush line on the southern bank of the Lomba river. This in itself would pose some problems.



Firstly the bush line did not run straight, which could result in the open attack formation being boxed in as the right navigation vehicle adapt direction to compensate for this. The floodplain adjacent to the bush line, at places up to 300 m from the Lomba river, could be used by Fapla to counter attack from the north. This attack would have to be infantry strong. The density of the terrain dictated a narrow front of attack. This could prevent adequate manoeuvring space for the Ratel 90's. This factor could also prevent proper integration of the Ratel 20's and the infantry, should the need for infantry arise.

Both these limitations dictated that Fapla would have to be attacked on their strongest point, the crossing point to the TMM bridge to the north. They would certainly expected us to use this advance route. This would give them ample time to prepare for our arrival. This limitation also favoured Fapla to launch an attack from the south, and trap us against the river. This necessitated a strong force as a flank guard to the south, but still close enough to be able to join the main battle on very short notice.

This then necessitated a strong Unita force to our south flank, to bind, destroy and channel the Fapla Bde reserve into our arch of fire. The advantage was that the ground surface was firm and no streams or dongas would prevent both the advance and attack. The lack of prominent terrain forms dictated that we would have to rely very strongly on moving from consolidated base to consolidated base. We furthermore were outnumbered heavily in both personnel and sophisticated weapon systems. It was not a very favourable situation. A victory could only be possible should we attack them in the critical timeframe when they could be observed to be off balance.







Prior to our departure for this reconnaissance, RSM Kemp discreetly gave my group a packet of fresh meat. As the rest of the team departed, the CGp C stayed behind for a quick barbeque. That was risky. The main force of 47 Bde could not have been more than 5km away, and their forward patrols could have been quite close to our position. I posted a sentry in a high tree, and we quickly lit a fire and very soon the nice smell of frying meat hung over the tree tops. I learned from previous operations to rely strongly on my sixth sense. At one stage, my instinct warned me that it was time to go. We departed the spot with the smell of barbeque in the air. We hoped that FAPLA could also smell it. Our contribution to a little bit of psychological warfare on the enemy.

















***Diary Theuns Cloete***

***28 Sept - The leader group joined up with the Major. The whole bunch of ranks went to the objective where we were on Sunday. Saw a lot of destroyed vehicles and corpses too. Fapla shoots at us across the Lomba from the northern bank. Arrived at the hide around 21h00.***

***29 Sept - Joined at Majors Ratel to rehearse a new plan. Arrived back at our hide about 16h00 in the evening, went to bed at about 23h30 that night.***

***30 Sept - Everything quiet. In the evening whe formed a closed laager, went to sleep at about 23:30.***













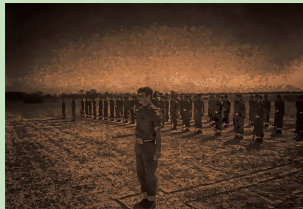




**Diary Hugo Gerryts**

***1 Oct - Midnight RSM Kemp arrived with his A echelon. The 81 mm mortar fire group and we the protection element formed a close laager together. First time that we saw the MLOS. Our artillery deliver from different positions heavy bombardments on the enemy. Rsm told us that our Prime Minister and other seniors visited Mavinga. Two Mig's darted over our position and bombed about 3 km from our position. We are told that should there be any gas attack to stay in our foxholes. BM 21's bombed a position about 2 km from our hide.***

***2 Oct – Doing maintenance on vehicles and lie low. Two Mig's darted overhead while we receiving orders. After dark the whole of 61 Mech moved into an assembly area.***



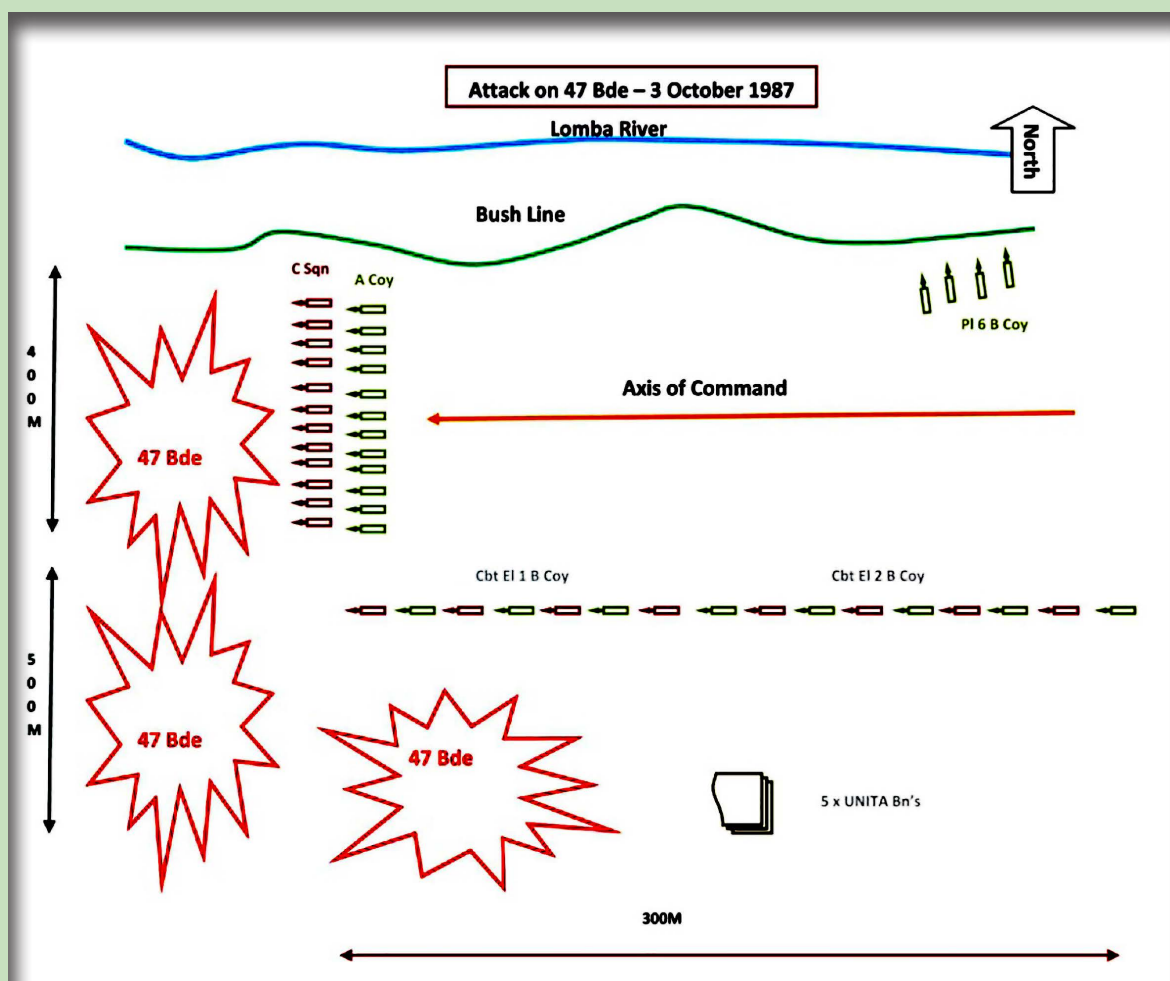


## The Attack on 3 October



The attack was planned to take place on 5 October, but due to the position of 47 Bde on 2 October, it was decided to attack on 3 October.

By the afternoon of 2 October, it became clear that Fapla was ready to start crossing the Lomba river to join up with their forces on the north bank. This was confirmed on the morning of 3 October. Their planned crossing also gave us the opportunity for which we hoped. During a crossing over a single TMM bridge their forces would be concentrated in the bush line at the crossing point. Furthermore their force would experience some degree of disorganisation, which usually accompanies a crossing. Our artillery could disrupt their command cohesion and create some degree of chaos. The odds were gradually turning into our favour. It became crucial for the overall success of the operation to prevent them from crossing the Lomba river. They must at all cost be destroyed as a fighting force, or their integrity as a threat minimised.





### *Diary Theuns Cloete*

*1 Oct - Woke up at 05:30, move back to our previous laager area out of reach to a FAPLA direct attack. Had a nice quiet time again all day. Go to sleep 23h30 and also roasted meat that day. RSM came to talk to us.*

*2 Oct - Woke up at 09h00. Informed that we will be moving to an attack on FAPLA 47 Brigade. Preparing and cleaning our weapons. We departed at sunset. Drove all night and reached our forming up position at 04h00.*



The battle concept was that we would attack on an east to west axis, as our previous reconnaissance already confirmed. The attack would take place with the widest front possible, pending our limitations. CGp A would do the frontal assault with C Sqn (12 Ratel 90's) in open battle formation with no internal depth element. A Coy (12 Ratel 20's) would deploy as the reserve and also the function of integrating to encounter possible Fapla infantry in trenches.

FAPLA infantry in trenches was a real possibility, as had been learnt from the day attack during 13 September. CGp C would form the flank guard to the south, to prevent a FAPLA flank attack. We would deploy in an extended line, forming the bottom of the combined force box formation. Five UNITA Battalions would attack the FAPLA deployments south of this box formation formed by 61 Mech. This would bring us in a very peculiar situation, since the five Unita Batalions to our south as foot soldiers, might be caught up between us and FAPLA, should the latter be able to overrun the UNITA's and do a flank attack from the south. Our function would also be that of reserve for the attacking force. The 60mm converted Pl 6 from B Coy would deploy on the Lomba, preventing an attack from the north.



During the day of 2 October and right through the night, 47 Bde attempted to cross over the TMM bridge to the north bank. This concentration of vehicles was ideal targets for our artillery. By the morning of 3 October, they temporarily gave up all attempts as they were too exposed during daylight hours. They started to return to their previously occupied positions on the south bank to await the darkness for a renewed attempt. The time to attack had come.

On the morning of 3 October, CGp A and CGp C were assembled west of the old UNITA log base. We started moving on our east to west axis of advance just about 05:00. A UNITA reconnaissance platoon fanned out to our front. Bravo moved perpendicular with the rest to be in position as the southern flank force ready and in place once the battle started. Platoon 6 moved under direct command of Cmdt Smit to deploy north of the box formation.

*Diary Len Robberts (C Sqn).*

*04:00 - orders for the attack on 47 FAPLA Brigade. C Sqn to eliminate hard point targets and A Coy - Ratel 20's to integrate and render support to the Ratel 90's. Bravo as flank force.*

*05:00 - Drive with vehicle lights turned off. Rely on nightsight devices. Enemy mortars fired at us.*

*07:00 - From forming up place started the advance.*

*09:10 - UNITA move forward and made contact with the advance posts of FAPLA.*

*09:40 - Unita fell back and we advanced. We are deployed in a line abreast with all three troops in front. We commenced with speculative fire. The terrain is fairly dense and we encounter abandoned foxholes.*

*10:00 - G5 and MRL fire on the target. Enemy retaliated with mortar fire.*

*10:21 - Two Mig21's approached low over the battle front. Their bombs of target. We heard their engine noise and observe them closely. Enemy mortars became more effective. A few meters in front of our frontline. We retreated slowly to enable A Coy to manoeuvre. Reports of T55 tanks to our front. Troop 33 the first to observe them. Lots of small arm's fire. The drivers window covered with shrapnel marks.*

*11:30 - Withdraw to reorganise and to consolidate. Reports of destroyed five T55 tanks, one BTR and a diesel bunker destroyed.*

When C Sqn made contact, Unita was still engaging the FAPLA rear to the south. Many FAPLA soldiers just abandoned their equipment and made for the crossing point. The TMM bridge was still blocked, but was rammed open by a tank. Some vehicles tried to cross, and succeeded. Soon the bridge was blocked



again. C Sqn went in for the attack and engaged the deployed T55's. A ferocious fight broke out. About midday, C Sqn started to experience heavy resistance. Cmdt Smit pulled them back and called in the G5's. There were reports of T55's moving on the southern flank. Due to this ATk Gp (71) from CGp C rushed to join the south flank of C Sqn.



During the opening stage of the contact on the front, we Bravo as the south leg of the 61 Mech box formation came under fire from 23mm and 14.5mm guns with automatic bursts ripping through the Bravo formation. My frustration was that I could not break formation and deploy southwards to meet the threat. If I did break formation, I would have left C Sqn vulnerable from the rear. My instinct on turning my flanks to the South was tremendously strong. At one stage one of my Ratel 20's (I think it was Cpl Schutte) was so thickly covered with dust, that I was certain it was hit. I changed over to the platoon frequency – one thing I never did before – because by doing that you might give the Pl Cdr the impression that you want to take over his little piece of responsibility. I was so relieved when Schutte answered – “no hit”!

Within the first 30 minutes of the contact, it seemed that most of the FAPLA resistance was on the front of the first contact. C Sqn shortly experienced a shortage of ammo. They also started experiencing problems with the overburdened



90mm recoil systems. 2Lt Hind was killed when a tank round ricocheted from the ground and penetrated the turret of Ratel 33. The four Ratel 90's of 71 were deployed to the south flank of C Sqn. 71 was not on the C sqn radio net and received their orders directly from Cmdt Smit. Since they had time to orientate themselves prior to entering the contact zone, they didn't have to fire for effect as was the case with C Sqn. That saved ammunition, so that when C Sqn withdrew after Hind's Ratel was shot out, they had ample ammunition left. That enabled Cmdt Smit to use them in the place of C Sqn directly after an artillery bombardment took place. A Tk group 72 joined up with 71 against the main target.

*Kurt Oelofse C Squadron recalls: " We had set up positions in line a breast and started to move forward. We leap frogged in 50 m bounds and were informed that we were about 300 m from the enemy. I was still fairly relaxed at that stage. We made one or two moves forward . Standing next to a tree 1 o'clock my position, I was looking down the barrel of a T55 tank. I could not see the length of the barrel since I was looking straight down the barrel .After the 3rd heat round, the T55 started burning. Btrs and T55's were everywhere. The small arms fire against the side of the ratel sounded like hail on a tin roof. Our Ratel also taken a hit on the drivers window by a RPG 7. Right in front of my Ratel, out jumped a section infantry from their foxhole. My co-axial browning jammed and I could not clear the stoppage. At one stage 2Lt Hind told me to stand-down as we only had 11-13, 90mm rounds left. The we were hit. I felt heat in my face, saw orange in front of me, with a white dot in the middle and what sounded like two large electrical cables shorting out. We had just taken a hit from a T55. I shouted to Glen to reverse and as I looked to my left Adrian's face was covered in blood and he said something that we had been hit. The next thing I knew I was jumping off the Ratel and started running back towards our rear. Everything went silent as I was running.*





The four Ratel 90's of 71 were deployed to the south flank of C Sqn. 71 was not on the C sqn radio net and received their orders directly from Cmdt Smit. As it was now clear that the south flank was occupied by Unita, Cmdt Smit ordered 72 in line. Since they had time to orientate themselves prior to enter the contact zone, they didn't have to fire for effect as was the case with C Sqn. That saved ammunition, so that when C Sqn withdrew after Hind's Ratel was shot out, they had ample ammunition left. That enabled Cmdt Smit to use them in the place of C Sqn directly after an artillery bombardment took place. A Tk group 72 joined up with 71 against the main target. When the bombardment was lifted, the remaining two platoons (Pl 4 and 5) also joined the already deployed two deployed A Tk groups. Section 22 B was ordered to protect the damaged Ratel.

*Willem Grobler Recalls: "Our platoon was ordered to be ready to be integrated in our Combat element A Tk 72 and moved behind the front line formed by A TK group 72. As the rest of platoon 22 moved past Hind's Ratel (Ratel 33), our section (22B) was instructed to debus and protect that Ratel. We debussed and went into an all-round defence. The casualties were already evacuated. We were to assist the recovery to hook up Ratel 33. On the front the battle was still raging but after a while subsided as the focus shifted to the bush line of the Lomba. As soon as Ratel 33 was recovered our section joined up with our platoon now facing north and shooting over the Lomba river."*

When both the ATk groups (71 and 72) took control of the front. There was still a lot of fight left in FAPLA. The rest of Bravo joined in. Bravo recovered Hind's Ratel and in the process shot out another 2 T55's. We advanced while C Sqn and A Coy became the reserve. Johan Kooij engaged a self-propelled anti-aircraft gun, with eight direct hits. It disappeared in the bush. It was later located about 2km from the battlefield where it ran out of fuel.

*Andre Herselman (C Sqn) recalls: "It was chaos soon after we shot out the first tank, as we didn't know what was shot out and what not anymore. We didn't want to take chances. One also got away. We went over a bush to get into a new position and there it was, dug in right in front of us. I remember the turret and the barrel that was aimed straight at us. Luckily the crew was sitting on top of the turret. I aimed at the turret, fired, and then we reversed at the speed of light. When we returned to take it on from another position it was gone!"*







**Diary Hugo Gerryts**

*3rd Oct: Got to laager at 01h00. Received orders from Cpl Uys at 04h00. 23B and 23C are assigned to OA. Rode on left flank against the shona. Heard there is a problem with fuel and so there will be little air support. We rode to a place where we received orders. Our ratel was having drive problems so we replaced the fuel filters.*

*Drew Fire at 10h30. Artillery bombardment fell short but without damage inside advancing Unita. Mortars from 47 and 59 brigades start falling nears us. Unita attacked 59 Brigade when they tried to assist 47 brigade. We withdrew and then advanced again still escorting OA. Starting firing with 20mm at Fapla fleeing across shona. Someone was shot through shoulder and someone had shrapnel in his ass. 33 was also hit.*

*We pull back and artillery fire shoots Fapla to pieces, Fapla abandoned their vehicles and ran. We re-join B company up front. Massive amount of vehicles moving on other side of shona, they are being bombarded. Pull back with O and it starts to get dark. Unita moved into target to secure it.*

*Stop at recovery and see the shot out 33 ratel. Didn't look good. Ride behind recovery. 28 towed 60A to refuel point. Ride back to our laager. Camouflage and sleep. Twice the following day Migs flew over us.*









By then all 47 Bde resistance had crumbled. The action moved to the north again, where A Coy and the still serviceable Ratel 90's from C Sqn created havoc for the FAPLA soldiers crossing the open shona. Just after 17:00 Cmdt Smit assembled his sub unit commanders at his Ratel and announced that 47 Bde was destroyed. We pulled back to a safe area about 8km southeast of the old UNITA log base. It was the responsibility of other SADF elements and UNITA to mop up the battlefield.

*Stelios Moraitis recalls: (South Flank) "For us it was quite a boring attack. At one stage we were instructed to get down and close the hatches because of mortar and small arms fire. We also received some 23mm fire. It was extremely hot and uncomfortable inside the Ratel. At one stage during the attack, I became aware of someone that had jumped on to the back of my Ratel and was sitting on top of the spare wheel! It was one of those "Operator" people and he politely asked if I minded that he took the liberty of hitching a ride with us. Of course, I agreed, I thought it best to be nice to this chap!"*



*Willie Uys recalls: "The enemy bombarded us with artillery between 11:00 and 14:00. After 14:00 they didn't anymore – they probably ran out of ammunition!"*



*Paul Ronge recalls: (North Flank) "We shot the crap out of them and thinned them out so much that it looked like playing ten-pin bowling with mortars. The barrels heated up so much that the charges ignited before hitting the firing pin. The bombs then fell just a short distance in front of you – harmless naturally, as it had to fly a distance before it armed. We had to p\_ss on the hot pipes to get them to cool down. FAPLA was very close as we did not need to put on maximum charges. The sand was so soft that you had to dig out the small base plate. It was difficult to centre the spirit levels after firing a couple of rounds. The advantage was that you did not need a spade to dig in the base plate. We just made three troughs with our feet, jumped on it with both feet, and it was ready for action!"*



*Willie Uys recalls: (North Flank) "Out Ratel was on the far right next to the shona. I reported to Cmdt Smit that FAPLA was starting to flee across the shona - all kinds of armoured vehicles and tanks full of troops, some hanging from the sides due to lack of space. Then, 2 minutes later, they were shelled by the artillery and MRL's (Multiple Rocket Launchers). When the dust settled the vehicles were standing still and no living being was left."*









*Jaco Swanevelder recalls: "When FAPLA ran across the floodplain, 71 and 72 also participated in the "turkey shoot" from the bush-line. We shot a couple of HE's (High Explosive shells) in among the fleeing bunch. 71A and 72A were firing from stationary positions on either side of one heck of a big tree, nothing more than 10m apart. Firing, without changing position, nearly cost us dearly when a tank across the river shot the tree between us to smithereens. It was so close that fragments of tree and leaves rained down on us. We withdrew from the target area directly afterwards. I often think about the soldiers that died after the will to fight was strangled out of them...is it fair to shoot an enemy, who left his weapons and ran, in the back?"*

*John McCrum recalls: "The infantry debussed from the Ratel. The LMG group and I sat in a little depression on the edge of the shona and looked out over the fleeing FAPLA troops and vehicles. I remember we tried to get comms with the artillery to bomb them, not realizing we already had observers in the area. It seemed to take ages before the airburst finally arrived. After the air burst there weren't as many troops, and the vehicles had stopped moving, some of them were in flames."*

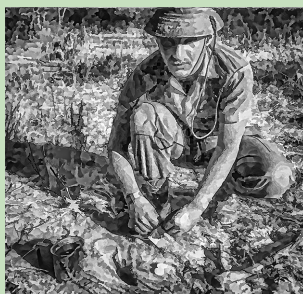




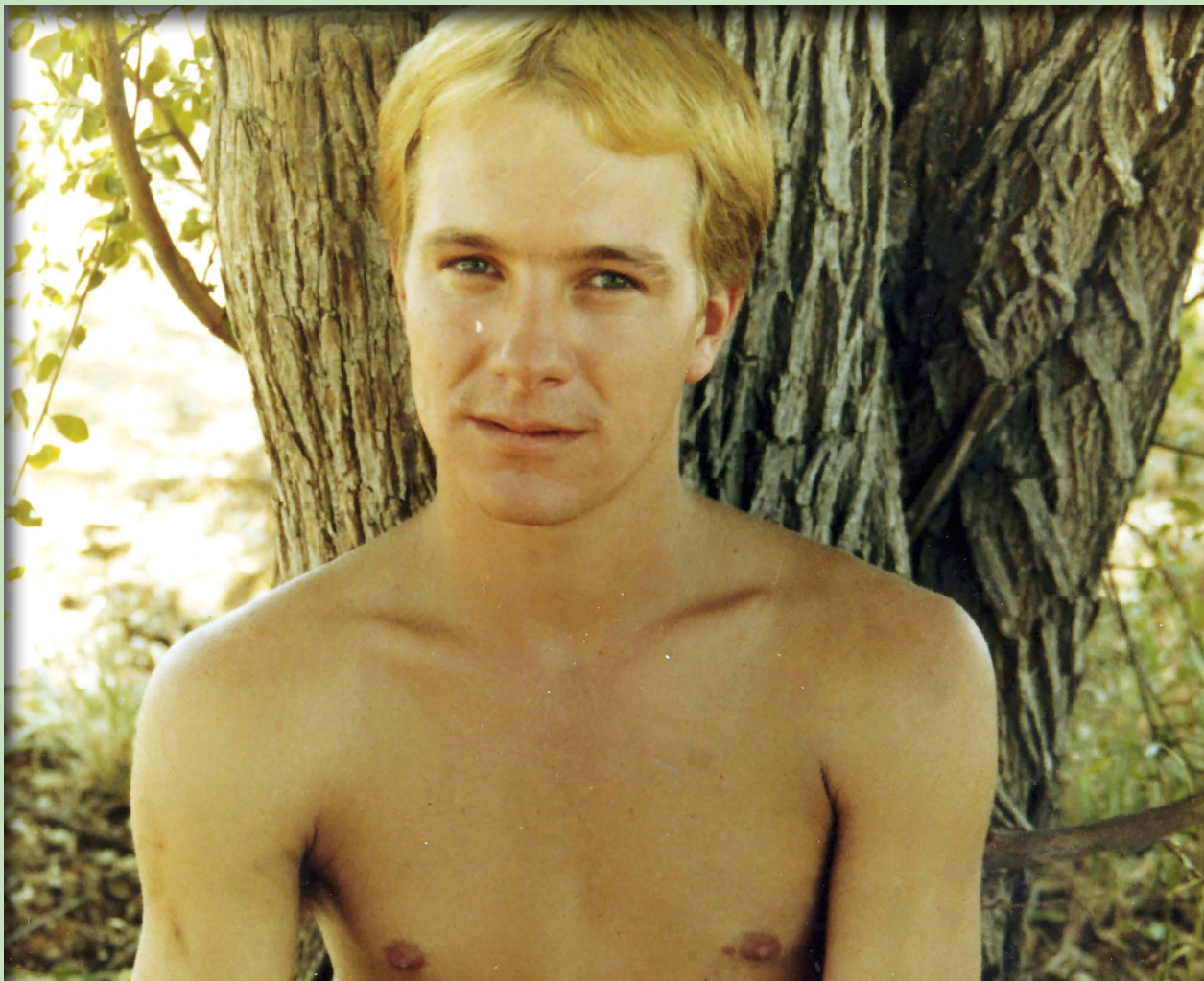
*Jaco Swanevelder recalls: "We found 18 tanks on the target with 10 being shot out. Six by C Sqn and four by the ATk Platoon. Eight undamaged tanks went to UNITA. The mileage on most was so low that it was clear that they were driven directly from the ships in Luanda to the front at the Lomba. The ATk Pl also shot out a number of BRDM's and BMP's."*

*(BRDM: Lightly armoured Russian combat patrol vehicle)*

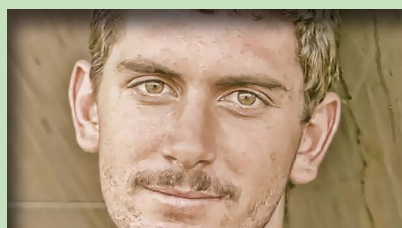
*(BMP: Russian tracked infantry fighting vehicle)*







*Robert Torrani recalls: "The small arms fire was bouncing of our Ratel. As I was looking out from the turret, there was a pearl spotted owl sitting on a branch right next to the Ratel as we passed. It just seemed so surreal - small arms fire, artillery rounds going off - in the middle of a battle this owl was just sitting there. Our orders were to deploy on the bush line to fire on the retreating FAPLA. I had a stoppage on the 20mm, firing HE (high explosive) rounds. A browning link had fallen in the chute. I changed it over to armour piercing for a few rounds from the other chute. Then it also got a link caught, so we just used the Browning. My corporal was pulling the trigger of the Browning while I was trying to move the turret on targets and trying to sort them out. We were ordered back when we started taking tank fire from the other side of the shona."*





***Diary Hugo Gerryts***

***5 Oct - FAPLA losses confirmed: 9 T55 destroyed, 11 captured. 120 Log vehicles destroyed and captured. A number of BTR and BMP's captured. Complete SAM \* system captured. FAPLA Air bombed their own forces. 4 SAI said to be on their way with Olifant Tanks. Attend orders - plans for the future is very vague.***

***Doug Beveridge quoting Igor Zhdarkin: "At the time of its flight during the crossing of the river Lomba, the 47th brigade lost 18 tanks, 20 armoured troop carriers, 4 D-30 (122mm) guns, 3 BM-21s valley fire, 4 Osa-AK anti-aircraft [mobile] rocket launchers, 2 Osa-AKs transport cars, one P-19 radar station, heavy automobiles, broadcasting stations, mortars, grenade throwers, approximately 200 pieces of small arms, etc., etc."***





## Follow Up the FAPLA Retreat



When FAPLA started retreating after 3 October, it would have been ideal for us to follow up in pursuit. We could however not make use of this opportunity. We had too little forces available and our supply lines were overstretched. We had no choice but to allow FAPLA to escape. They started to move back to the area at the source of the Cunzumbia and the Chaminga high ground. CGp A and CGp C moved to an area near the source of the Lomba. CGp C was warned to be on standby to assist 32 Bn, should the need arise. Our artillery and air force kept the retreating Bdes under pressure.

### *Diary Hugo Gerryts*

*4 October - Woke up by Migs bombardment in the distance. During the dag quite a few Migs overhead. Depart to a new hide 23 km east. Saw our 120mm Mort Fire.*

*6 - Cmdt Smit visit us. FAPLA Brigades without logistical support. We will most probably follow them.*

*7 - Gasmasks issued and training on gas attacks. Washing clothes.*

*8 - Visit 32 Bn and had a look at their weapons. News about one of C Sqn Ratels destroyed by a Mig.*





On 7 October, gas masks were issued and training on their use took place. Since the beginning of the operation, we were aware that FAPLA might have the capability to use chemical weapons against us. Some UNITA reports indicated that gas was indeed used against them.



*John McCrum recalls: "I remember doing the gas mask in the fox-hole drill, covered with poncho in 30 plus degrees. Bloody hot and uncomfortable."*

*Stelios Moraitis recalls: "I did the full drill only once. I was sitting in my foxhole with my facemask on and covered with my bivvy. The MiG's came to bomb again. I tried to report on the radio and realised no one would understand what I was saying, so I took it off! It was unbearably hot in the foxhole too. I think after that first time, we all decided to take our chances, seeing those guys could never bomb us accurately anyway..."*



























## Combat Team Delta



The realisation that the Ratel 90 had reached the limit of its usefulness; it was possible to knock out a T-54/55 with it, but most of the destroyed tanks had absorbed multiple shots before being put out of action. Our existing force had successfully executed its original mission by stopping the FAPLA offensive and inflicting very considerable damage in the process, but at this stage we just did not have the means to follow up the FAPLA retreat. On 10 October 4 SAI was mobilised. A new directive was issued. The second phase of the operation would be to destroy FAPLA forces east of the Quito River by 15 December.

However, 4 SAI Bn would only be available by 20 October. The possibility that FAPLA might use chemical weapons was considered a real threat. When 4 SAI crossed into Angola on 20 October, they officially became Combat Group Charlie. The old C Gp C (Bravo and A Tk from 61 Mech) ceased to exist. The plan now was for a new temporary combat group, titled Delta and comprising Bravo/A Tk and the 32 Battalion support company, to move ahead of the main body to reconnoitre and deal with any minor resistance.

The combined force was to deploy in the Mianei source area by 6.30am on 11 October, after which Delta would reconnoitre towards the Cuzizi source while Alpha would do the same to the west and north. Smit's temporary new Bravo Company – the two motorised infantry companies of 101 Battalion and Northmann's 32 Battalion anti-tank platoon - would follow to deploy south of Alpha. Quebec Battery would redeploy during the night of 10/11 October to an area north-west of the Lomba source; from there, still covered by Bravo's presence to the north, its guns could reach Cuito Cuanavale and all of the FAPLA brigades.





*Diary Hugo Gerryts*

*9 - Advance west to the source of the Lomba river.*

*12 - Our new hide in vicinity of the source of the Mianei river. FAPLA logistics convoy from Quito Canaval very slow due to Unita harrasment. G5 going to bomb the runway at Quito Can. We must wait until we can join up again.*

*13 - G5 bombardment on runway succesfull. Migs bombardment in the distace north and south of our position. FAPLA logistic convoy with 10 T55's and 120 log vehicles got through to the southern brigades.*

*We do perimeter foot patrol.*

*14 - BM 21 bombarment about 3 km from our position. Observe G5 bombs being fired during night.*



59 Brigade had been ordered to advance southwards and drive away the G-5s, which had been inflicting much damage under the guidance of Special Forces operators who had infiltrated to within visual range. 21 Brigade would then take over 59 Brigade's vacated positions to act as a covering force for the other brigades while they replenished and then moved back. By 15 October, 59 Brigade was dug in near the source of the Mianei River, 21 Brigade was at the source of the Cuzizi, 16 Brigade was lying up at the source of the Chambinga and 66 Brigade was guarding the bridge over the Chambinga. Pending the arrival of reinforcements in the form of 4 SAI and the improvement in 20 SA Brigade's logistics, we became reactive. From the 13th the G-5s had been shelling Cuito Cuanaval.









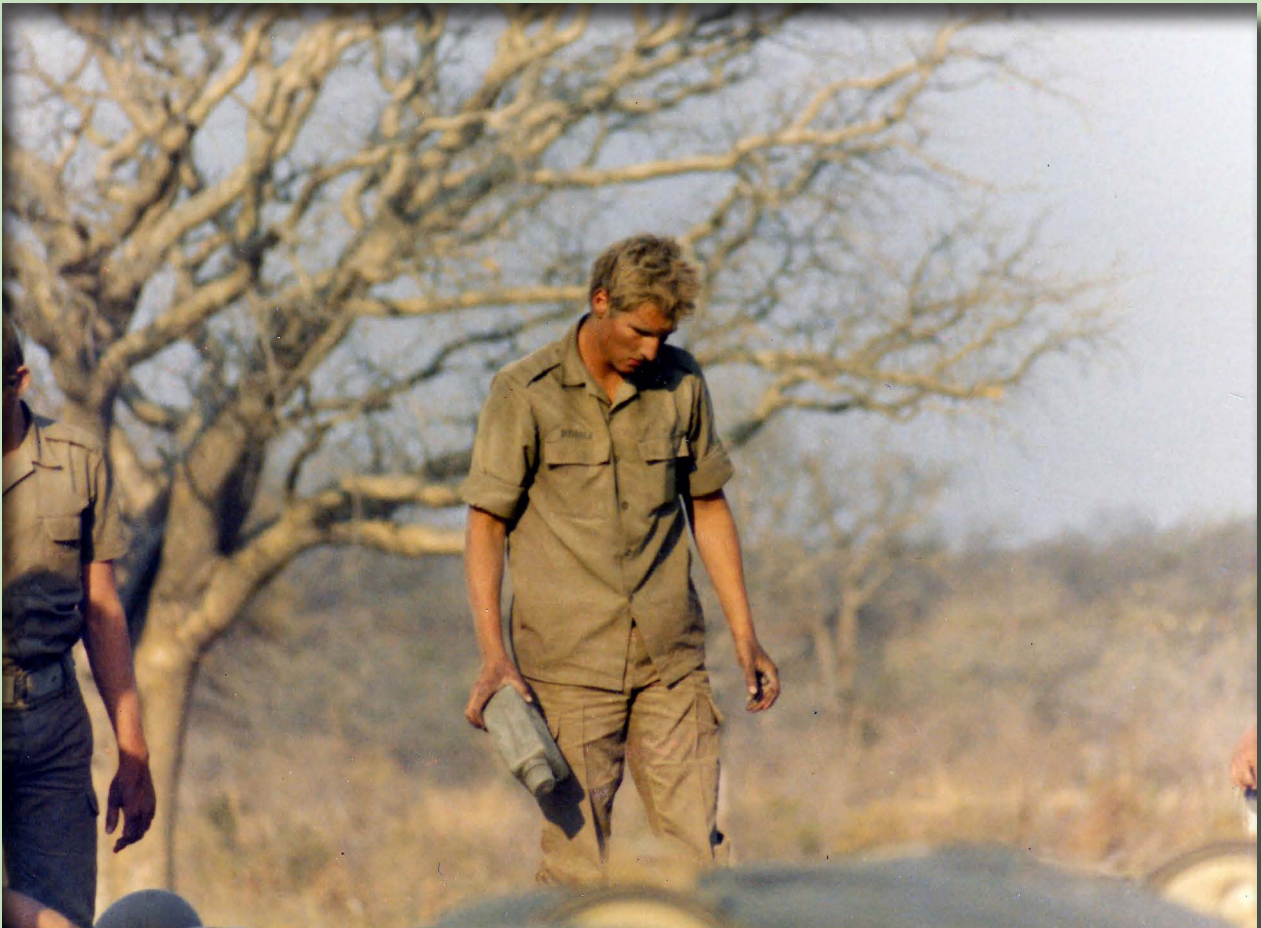














## Reconnaissance North of the source of the Mianei river

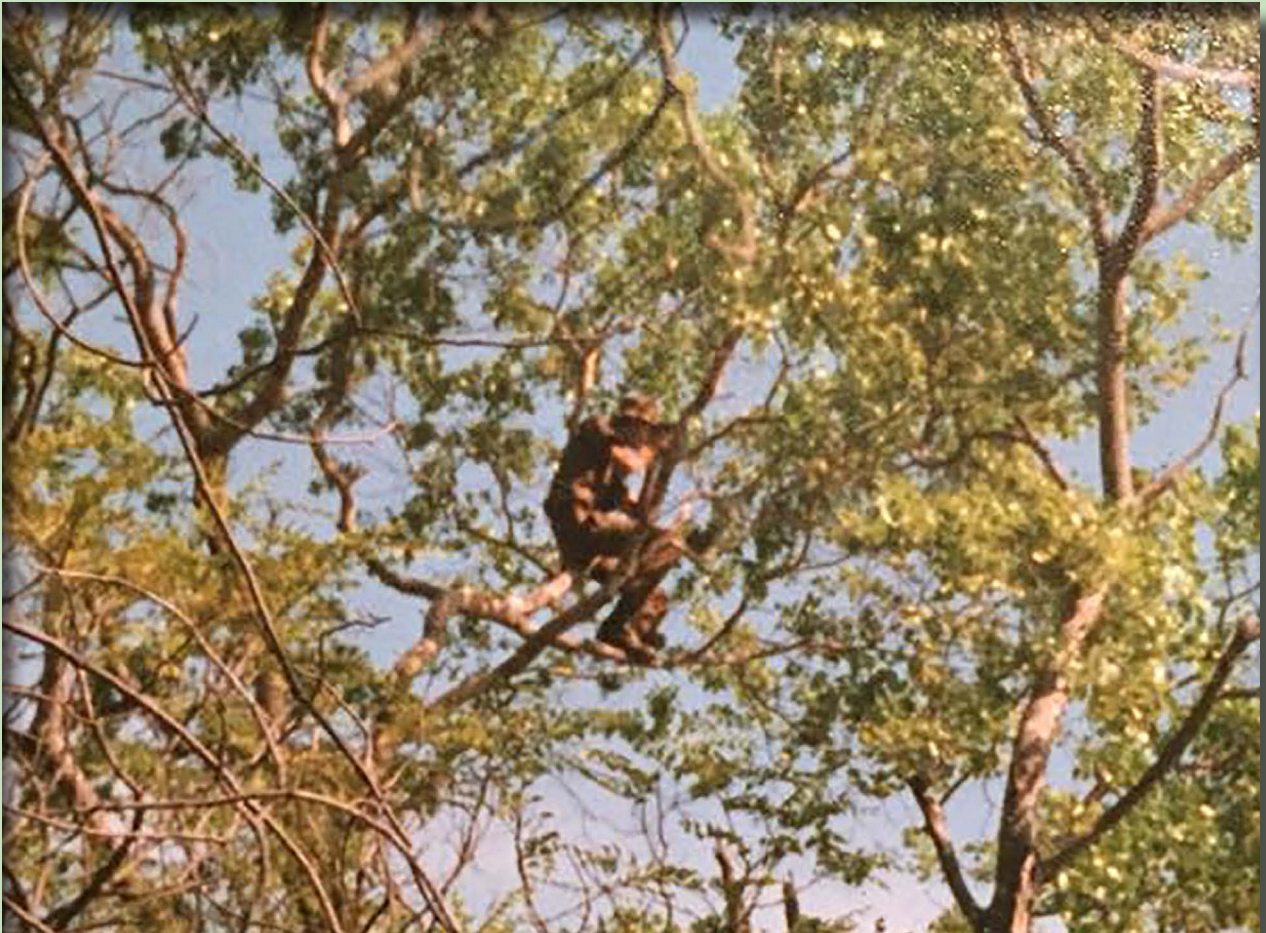


On 15 October the Bravo leadergroup joined up with the 61 Mech Reconnaissance team under command of Maj Laas the source of the Mianei River. We only used two vehicles. His Ratel, which was without a canon, and a Buffel. We came across the old tracks from 47 Bde, but we detected no recent activity. It was late afternoon when we departed back to our assembly area. Everything was quiet.

What we did not know was that we were under observation from FAPLA reconnaissance teams. 59 Bde was redeploying to the Mianei river and they nearly encircled us. We drew some very light small arms fire, but we thought it was UNITA stray bullets. When we reached the assembly area, we learned about the redeployment of 59 Bde. We reconstructed the events and realised our narrow escape – maybe 5 minutes before they would have captured us. This was confirmed the next morning when the fresh tracks were found.











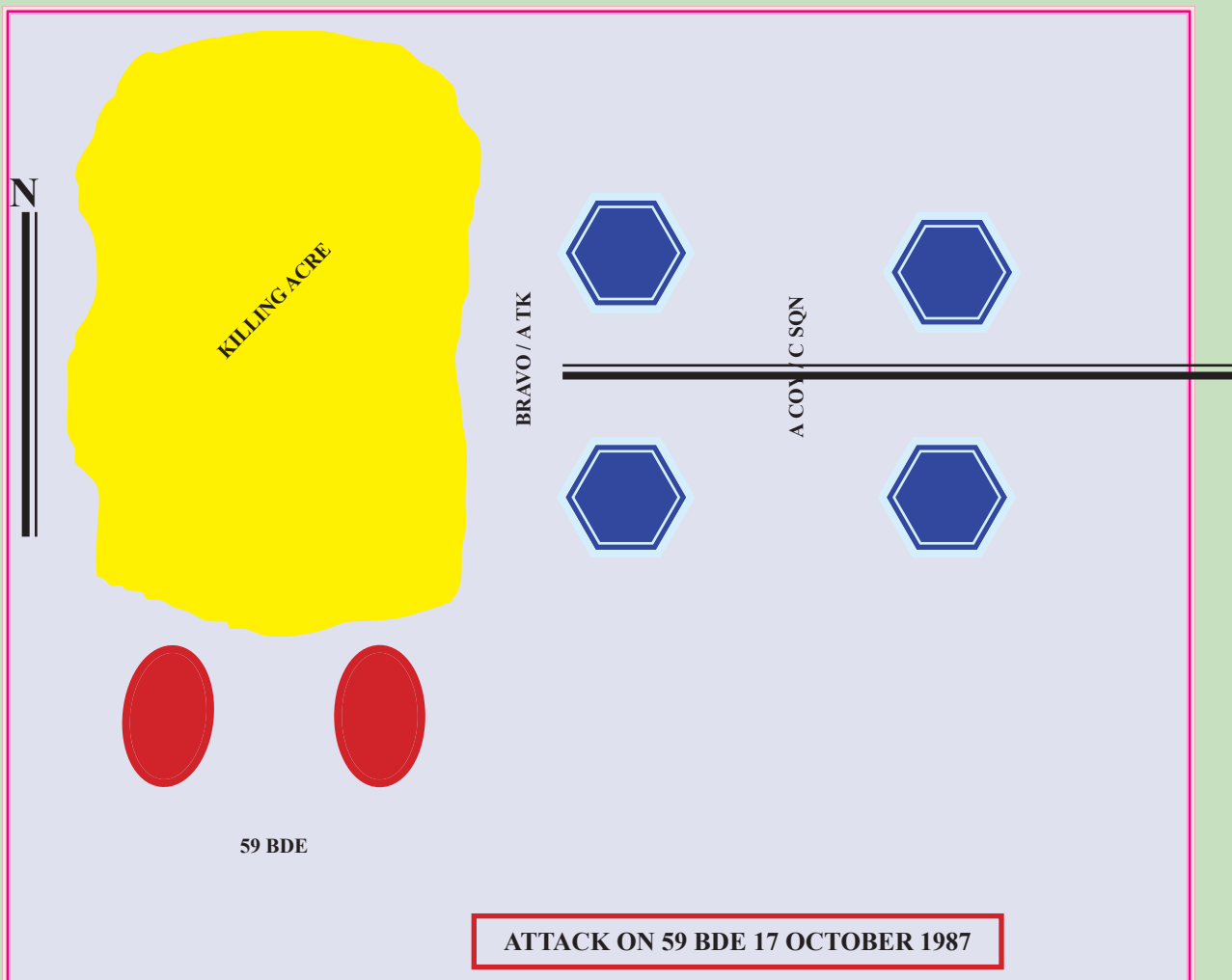


## The Attack on 59 Bde - 17 Oct



Combat Group Alpha had to attack 59 Brigade on 17 October while it was still deploying and therefore at its most vulnerable, Combat Group Bravo being moved forward to cover Alpha's flank. We moved north under cover of darkness past the source of the Mianei River. We reached the forward assembly area about 03:00. As we advanced further north, we found the fresh tracks of 59 Bde leading to the west. It was clear that FAPLA entered the gap between the Vim-pulo and Mianei Rivers and positioned themselves somewhere halfway between the two.

Just after 08:00, UNITA indicated that 59 Bde was just in front of us. Before we could deploy, 59 Bde activated their tank ambush. We were just slightly east of their killing ground and not fully exposed to their firing arches. The first T55 round went between my vehicle and that of Cmdt Smit, hitting a tree with a tremendous bang.





A round of some kind also landed in front of my Ratel, but did not explode. It was clear that we would not be able to deploy. I urgently wanted to pull my combat elements out, but could not do so. The rest of the 61 Mech elements were obstructing our withdrawal. It took some time for them to clear the command axis. After about 10 minutes I could disengage. I could only guess the reason for the low frequency of fire on us. We were just entering the killing zone, and FAPLA was busy redeploying closer to us. The terrain was also extremely densely vegetated. We fell back about 4km. Artillery then bombarded 59 Bde.



*Diary Theuns Cloete*

*17 - The aim of 59 Bde is to drive us south to get our G5's out of bombing range from Quito. They aggressively pushed south. We were ordered to destroy them with all that we had. Advance about 03h00. Halt to enable our Air Force do a first light bombardment. We were about 10 km away. 08:00 we advanced to contact. We drove in on their tracks and they had prepared a tank ambush for us. in very dense terrain. They opened fire at us but we couldn't deploy. We withdrew since we had no info on the strength of the enemy or their positions and formations in the thick bush. They covered our retreat with BM 21 fire.*

*Warren Sheridan recalls: "When the FAPLA tanks fired that first shot, it landed in front and to our right. I jumped into the turret and closed the hatch. Once I was in the turret, I realised that this was a tank shooting at us. I jumped back out of the turret. That was when the second shot went off just behind our car. I jumped back into the turret and then out again. This went on for a couple more times. FAPLA also had bushes cut and sharpened the stumps so that we could get punctures. Thank goodness we retreated on the same tracks that we advanced on!"*









*Cornie Botes recalls: “Myself, with 71, and Gerrie Coetzee, with 72, were the two Ratel 90’s that had to drive in front. We had to advance 100m, observe, and then report back. Then the other Ratel would go 100m. The bush was so dense that it sometimes felt like we were driving through a tunnel. UNITA’s men sat just where the bush started clearing. When they went back to the command vehicle in the rear that T55 let itself be heard. I remember there were men from Intelligence in a Buffel. Some of the Ratels nearly drove over them.”*

*Stelios Moraitis recalls: “All of a sudden there were shots ahead. Call Sign 20 was 50m in front of me. The command group, including 20, came racing past us trying to disengage from the firing. Eventually we managed to turn around and follow the rest. It was not long before we were out of range, but they were still shooting at us with the “Stalin organ”. There were explosions all around and I could hear the shrapnel whirring like helicopter blades above my head. There was a lot of dust around and I kept screaming at the driver to keep my directions, but he was driving to avoid the explosions! Suddenly it all stopped and we could re-group. This incident was one of the most confusing during our campaign!”*





*Theuns Cloete recalls: "I just remember how those bombs came rolling on and being deflected off the trees. Now and then one exploded. We reversed as fast as possible. I did not know a Ratel could reverse that fast!"*



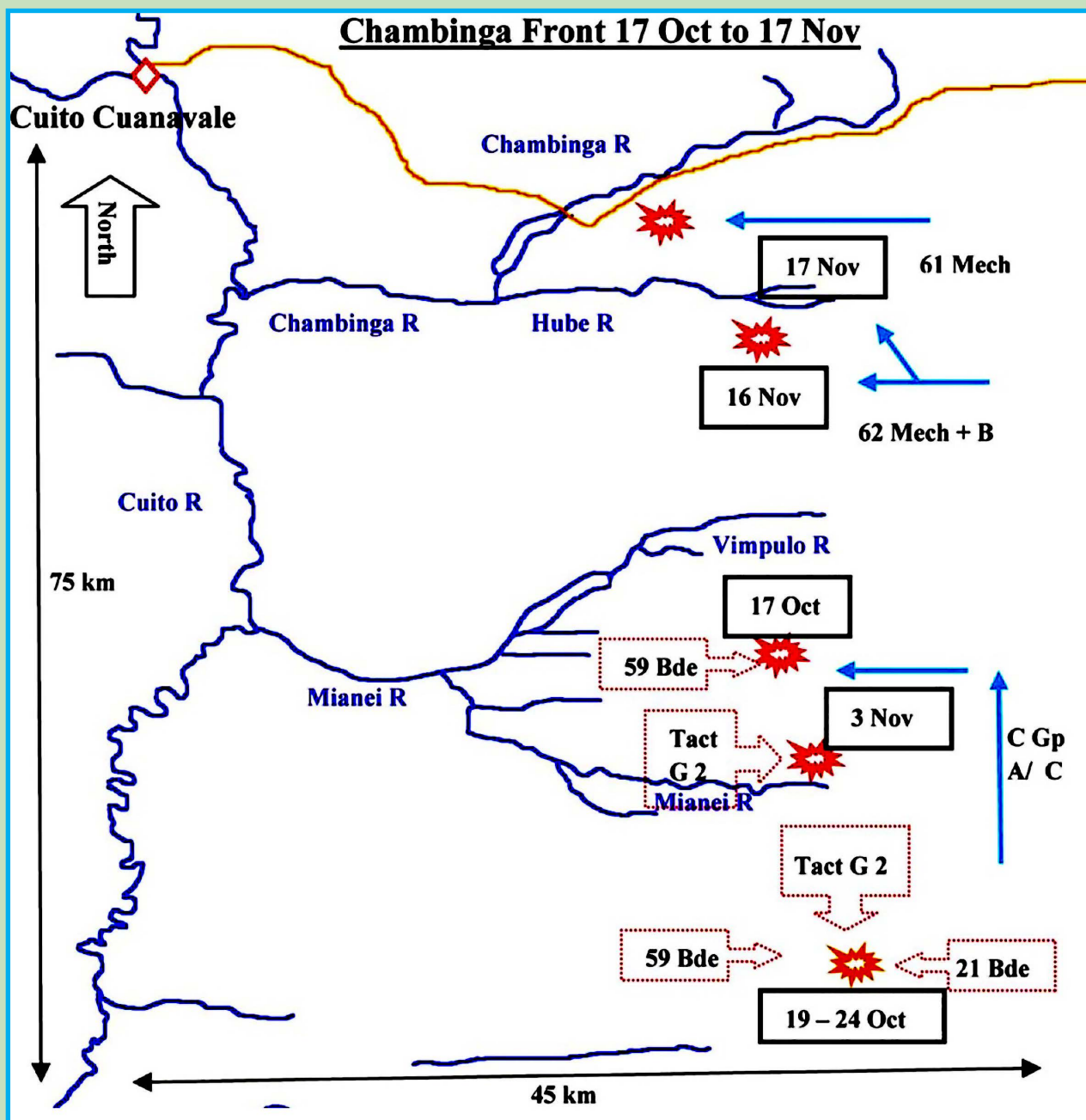


*Diary Hugo Gerryts*

*We advanced on fresh tank tracts. We draw fire from all directions to our front. We withdrew. Our artillery bombarded 59 Bde. Saw Migs bombarding a distance from our rear being hit by probably a Stinger. We Withdrew to the vicinity of our previous hide.*













## The Wedge - 18 To 24 October

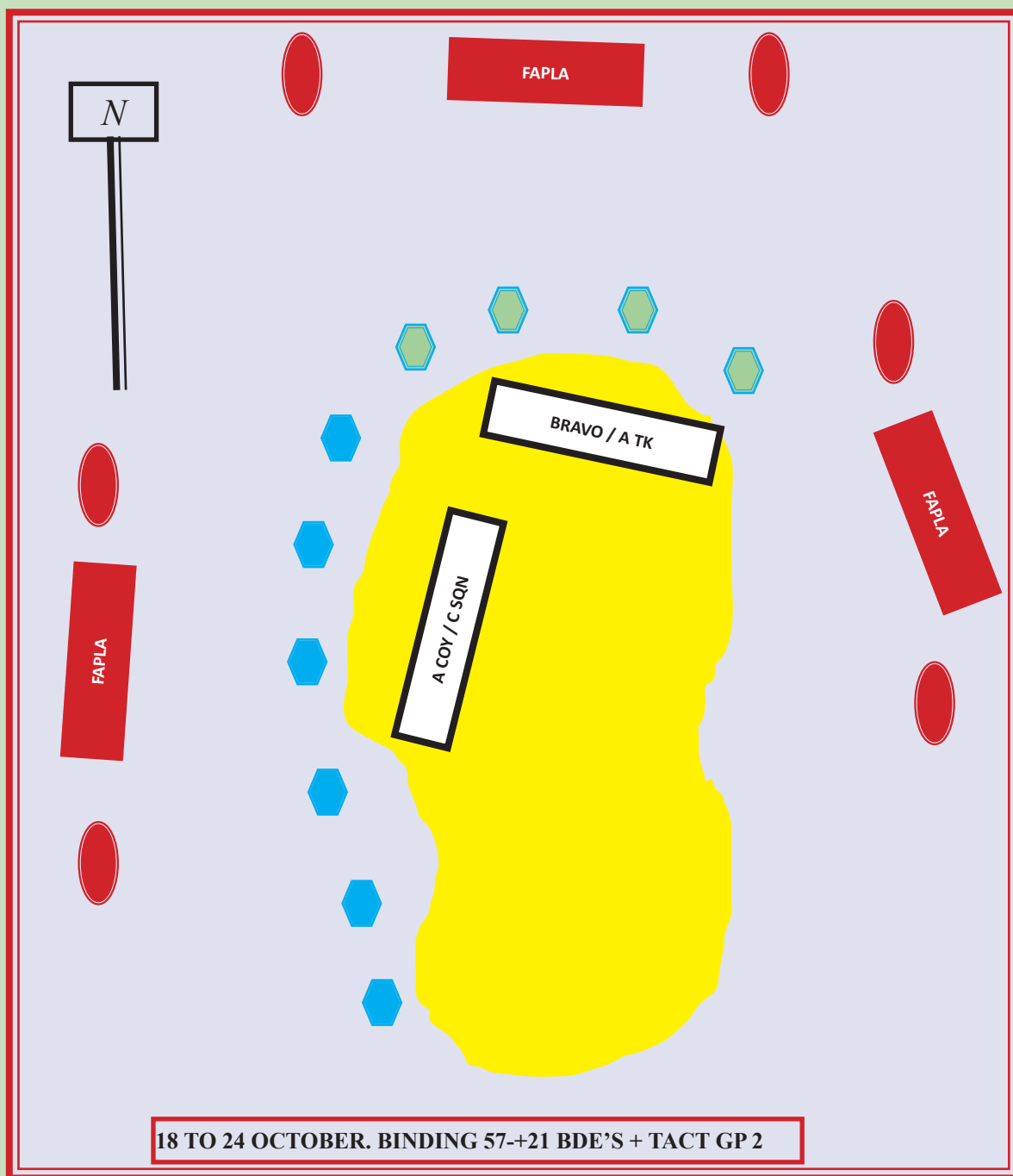


The situation for 59 Bde had worsened. An air force attack inflicted heavy casualties and supplies ran low. Tactical Group 2, consisting of nine T55's, started moving south from the Chaminga Bridge. They halted temporarily at the Vim-pulo source. Their next bound was to join up with 59 Bde.

On 18 October 61 Mech deployed to about halfway between the source of the Mianei and Vim-pulo rivers. In this vulnerable position, we had 59 Bde about 5km to the west and the advancing Tactical Group 2 about 6km to our north. Our intent was to prevent a link-up between the two forces and to protect the G5's. Any further retreating on our side would have forced the G5's to move further southeast. This would have taken them outside striking distance from the Cuito Cuanavale airfield.







At this stage, the G5's were less than 10km from 59 Bde. On the morning of 19 October, Tactical Group 2 was halted in its attempts to join up with 59 Bde by heavy artillery and complimentary air strikes. Their position was 3km south of the Catato woods. About the same time 59 Bde redeployed to alternative positions about 3km from their previous ones. This move brought them even closer to where 61 Mech was deployed. They started preparing alternative positions to be able to accommodate Tactical Group 2 on its arrival. Simultaneously with this, 21 Bde moved to a position west of the Cuzizi, about 6km from its source and about 4km to our east. Our position became very dangerous.







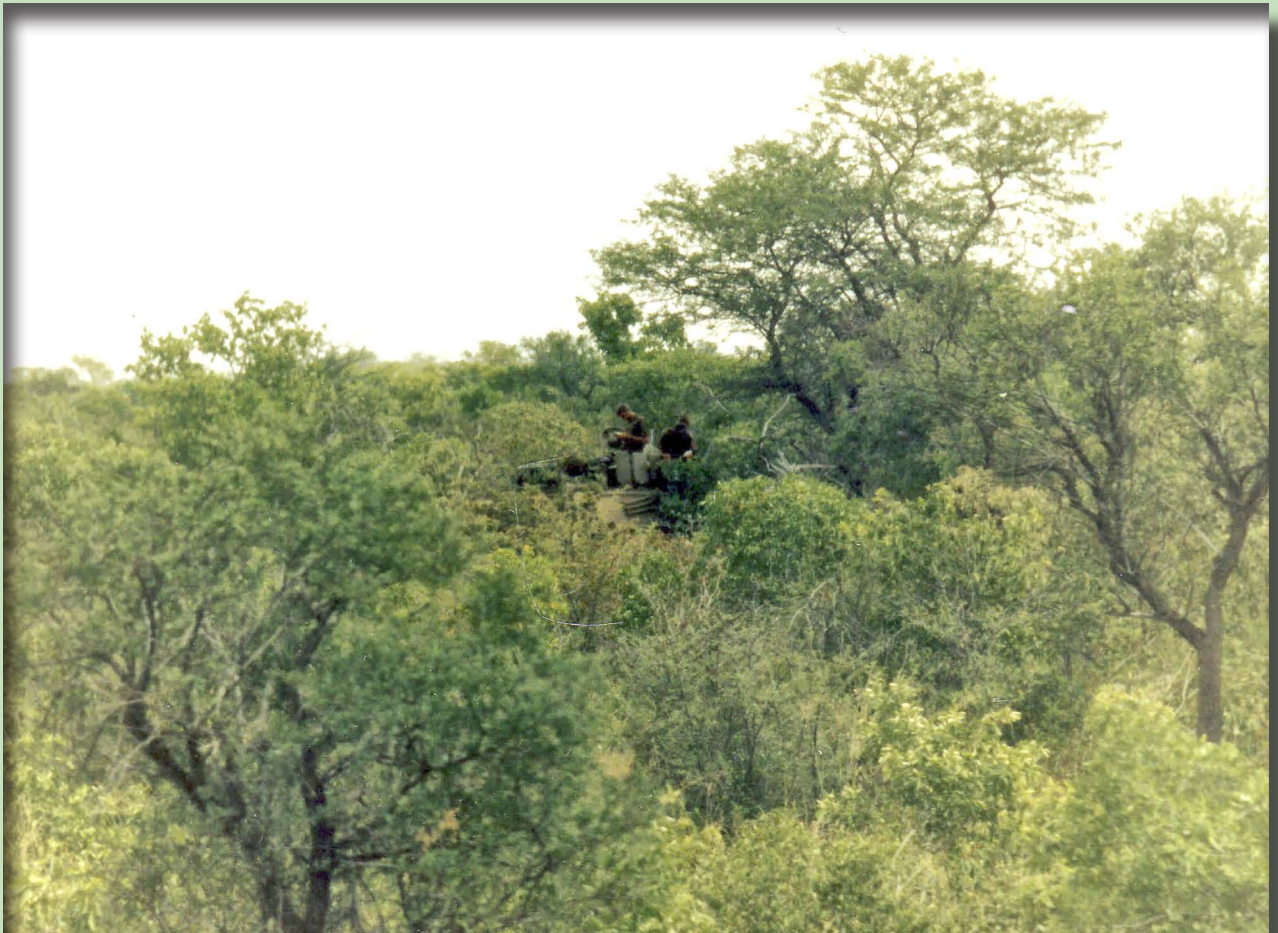
We were confronted with enemy on three sides: 59 Bde to the west, Tactical Group 2 to the north and 21 Bde to the east. We could not attack anyone of these without risking a combined attack by one or two of the others. We deployed in a semi square in very thick vegetation with about 50m spacing between vehicles. To our rear, there was a large shona. I could hear heavy FAPLA movement about 4km to our east and about 5km to our west.

The observers continuously reported movement to our north near the Catato Woods. Cmdt Smit showed his skills in directing the artillery fire. There were many artillery bombardments on different targets and in all directions. On my front, I had two observation posts in some high trees. Anything could happen at any time. It was nerve racking, especially when a heavy contact 3km to our east broke out. The shooting lasted about an hour. We later learned that it was a UNITA contact.

*Theuns Cloete recalls: "At a stage we heard vehicles moving from all directions. From my vantage point, in a tree about 200m in front of our vehicle, I could see dust rising in the north, east and west."*









At one stage I was hoping that we could go into an attack, just to break the suspense. Our tactical position was certainly not a healthy one. I was very relieved when, during the night of 24 October, we withdrew to a more sustainable position to the south.



*Paul Ronge recalls: "The G5's bombarded them continuously, even through the night. That was when I ripped open my sleeping bag, at 02:00, when the G5's let off a salvo on the enemy from very close to us. We kind off slept with one eye open. We, as troops, were very relieved when we fell back from that position. We knew FAPLA will do everything in its power to get to the G5's - and we stood in their way."*





*Diary Hugo Gerryts*

*23B On Escort Duty*

*18 - Our Ratel escorted Cmdt Smit to where the rest of 61 Mech deployed in a semi wedge next to a large open field. Estcourt-ter water bunkers. My Ratel departed and left me behind. I climbed onto the recovery vehicle. Recovery got stuck in a shona.*

*19 - Unsuccessful to get the recovery out. Washed in the river. Third attempt to pull the recovery out. While winching it out of the mud Mig's bombed us. Found large crater about 1 km from us. We were still way back from the main force at the wedge line. Camouflaged and slept.*

*20 - The Mig's frequented our hide at least five times. Saw them as the dropped cluster bombs.*

*21 - Four Mig's attacked UNITA who retaliate with their anti-aircraft guns.*

*22 - Three Mig's dropped bombs uncomfortably close to our position. Later the day more Mig's but they were off target.*

*23 - Ratel callsign 65 detonated a landmine. G5's and MRL bombarding 59 Bde. Enemy retaliated with BM 21's.*

*24 - Mig's very busy above. Drop propaganda leaflets.*

*25 - At last joined up with the main force. 30 - Recovery, replenishment and support our artillery effort.*

*26 - Escort the permanent force members for leave to the heli-strip.*

*27 to 28 - Various escort tasks.*

*29 - Transporting and protecting the dentist.*

*30 - Join Bravo on the way back to Mavinga.*





## The Return Journey to Mavinga in 36 Hours



On 30 October we fell back to Mavinga, where 4 SAI had arrived. We travelled about 90km on that night. We arrived close to Mavinga about midday on 1 November. We met the new officer commanding for 61 Mech Cmdt Muller. We were surprized since we suspected that Cnmdt Smit was relieved from his command, but no official announcement had reached us. At last we had some time to get our Ratels properly repaired. That illusion disappeared as Bravo had to replenish and immediately return to the Mianei front. Our departure on the front left a vacuum, which FAPLA rapidly exploited. They were advancing rapidly.

I expressed my concerns to Bde HQ. I pointed out that we (B Coy and ATk Pl) were active since 11 September. As Bde reserve, we were constantly on the move. When CGp A rested, we were supporting 32 Bn efforts. When 32 Bn went into recess, we moved to CGp A. From 11 September to 30 October we never had more than 48 hours to do proper maintenance. The mechanical and human components were in urgent need of maintenance and rest. Bde HQ took note of my concerns, but the situation on the western front demanded bold action. Even today I fail to understand why we retreated in the first place, when this FAPLA move had been predictable, even prior to our departure from the front.

### *Diary Theuns Cloete*

*29 October - Sleep late. Maj Lotter paid us an unexpected visit. He was very cross with us due to what he claimed was our low standard of readiness. He called us to his Ratel. We survived the punishment.*

*30 - Slept the whole day. At 18:00 we prepared to drive back to Mavinga. We drove through the night for 75 km.*

*31 - Went into a hide for the day. Received fresh rations and had a barbeque. Departed at 18:00 for the last stretch to Mavinga.*

*1 November - Another 45 km and we arrived at Mavinga Drift at 11:00.*

*2 - We mobilised to drive al the way back to the Mianei front. We departed at 23:00.*





Should we have stayed on the front, we would have done what we could, with what we had. When we returned to Mavinga, Bde HQ announced that the objective of the operation had been achieved. That was to stop the FAPLA advance. This created expectations with all of us. At that stage I just felt that Bravo Coy and the ATk Pl were abused. We drove all the way to Mavinga, just to return almost immediately. Röhmer Heitman (War in Angola, P119) quoted Col de Vries as to have made this statement: "Lotter was less than pleased with this decision. His company had been in contact or under threat almost continually since the beginning of the operation, and was now badly in need of rest." My confidence in the decision makers received another setback.

*Paul Ronge recalls: "We all thought: 'Thank you Lord, we survived!' Everyone was relieved and thankful. Then the order came to turn around. Emotions ran high among our troops. It gave us a nasty blow. It was as if something snapped."*





## Arrival Back on the Mianei Front



We arrived back at CGp B early the following morning of 3 November. During the night, a FAPLA force with at least six T55's advanced through the gap to a position just 2km from the G5's. Due to some technical problems, the G5's could not relocate to a safer position in time. The real threat was that at least one G5 would have to be destroyed, to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. Hannes Nortmann, with eight Ratel 90's and a 32 Bn company, were sent in and clashed with FAPLA at about 08:00.

We were drawn into the battle shortly afterwards. As we were approaching to join up, they were already engaged in heavy fighting. We could hear this from a distance. I had no idea what was going on, and Nortmann, being fully occupied in the fight, could not give me directions. I found his axis of command and, with only my Ratel and a small element, followed in. The rest of Bravo and ATk went into a fishbone formation, awaiting instructions. When I had a visual on Nortmann I took a few minutes to orientate myself on the situation. I was about 150 meters behind the 32 Bn Ratel 90 line.





They were in close combat with some T55's. I instructed Bravo and ATk, which were about 400m to the rear, to deploy in combat elements. As this instruction was executed, the FAPLA tanks broke contact with Nortmann. We did not have the opportunity to integrate or engage. I can only assume that the sudden appearance of Bravo and ATk was a contributing factor to this sudden FAPLA disengagement. Nortmann followed up for a few hundred meters with us in depth but FAPLA made a clear break away. Together we were now quite a formidable force of 16 Ratel 90's and 12 Ratel 20's.

On late afternoon on 5 November, I received instructions to prepare for a visit from Brig Fido Smit. He was the only high-ranking officer that visited us for the duration of Ops Modular. We had to prepare a heli-pad for a night landing - not an easy task given the terrain we were in. Should we had earlier warning, I could have instructed a closed laager, but it was too late since we were already dispersed in a semi open laager. To change this at that late hour would have meant semi-chaos. As many as possible had to attend his speech that was scheduled for 21:00. He only arrived around midnight. Various factors had already gnawed on the moral and for the members waiting in the darkness for hours, didn't help at all.

The reason for his visit became clear. Bde HQ developed concerns about the morale of the troops. His concern was among others, the level of our combat spirit. The background to this was a premeditated self-injury when one of our members shot himself through his foot. Brig Smit also officially confirmed the news that Cmdt Muller replaced Cmdt Smit as the officer commanding of 61 Mech. We already knew this but his announcement was the first official confirmation. He opened up a question-and-answer session, but few of his replies were sound. Then he made the biggest mistake by answering a question of how many soldiers were still going to suffer. His infamous reply was: "If you want to make omelette, you have to break eggs." This was just a metaphor and in normal circumstances would have been seen as such, however given the mood of the members this was interpreted in a hostile light. There were no more questions and he departed at about 01:30.





## The Pursuit - 9 November



On the 9th 4 SAI attacked 16 Bde in the north. To bind the FAPLA forces in the western sector a combat team from 32 under command of Nortmann and Bravo had to attack the FAPLA force in the gap between the Mianei- and Vimpulo rivers. The plan was that Nortmann would occupy the southern high ground and Bravo, ATK and the 81mm mortars the northern one. Wherever the FAPLA force was, one of us could then act as direct fire support base for the other. Nortmann was to move to the line of advance and then to halt. This would have given me the time to travel further north for about 1km to reach my starting point.

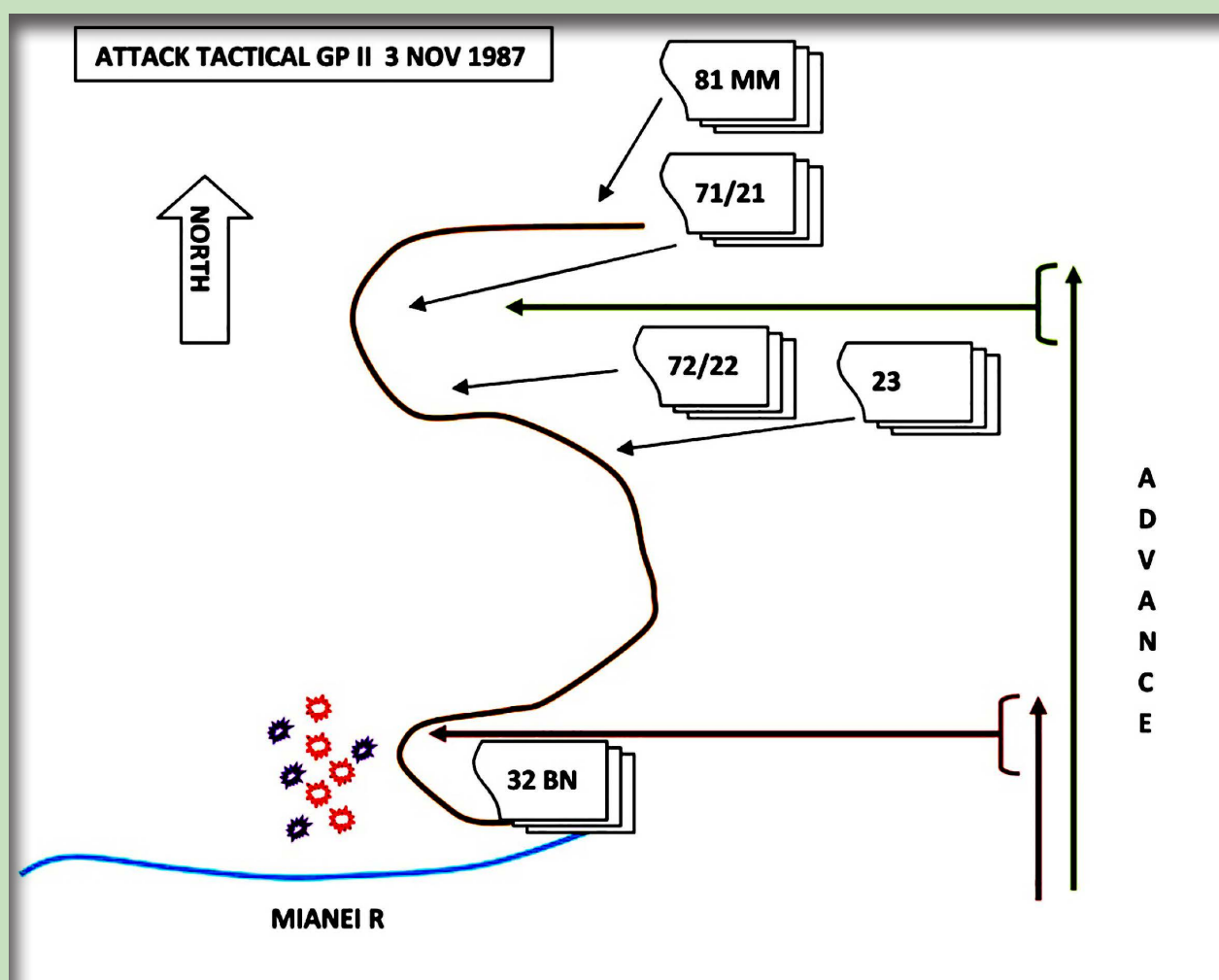
We reached the starting points between 13:30 and 14:00. We simultaneously started the advance to the terrain forms. I deployed the 81mm mortar fire group in the dead ground just to the immediate east. We learned that the FAPLA hide-out was about 800m due west from the terrain that Nortmann was occupying. I therefore deployed the Bravo Coy combat elements to face the south-south-west. We were still deploying when T55's attacked Nortmann - just as his Ratels crossed the summit. They clashed on the western flats.





The 32 Bn ATk was confronted at very close distance by the T55's. A real dog-fight broke out and shortly afterwards the two forces became entangled. From my position about 800m to the northeast, it was like watching a very real movie. I could not render direct fire support due to this complete entanglement. The 81mm mortar fire group engaged the depth targets. At one stage, Hannes gave me a grid for 81mm fire. The grid reference was exactly where this close quarter fight was progressing. FAPLA was getting the upper hand. Bravo and ATk prepared to attack in support. I questioned Hannes on the accuracy of his grid reference.

He spoke to me rapidly on the radio: "There is no time for talking, Just throw, just throw!" The four pipes in the 81mm mortar fire group fired four to six rounds each onto the entanglement (between 16 and 24 bombs). The tanks started to disengage. The mortars continued their effort on the withdrawing tanks. This gave Hannes the opportunity to retreat. We met up at the advance axis





He was planning an immediate pursuit. However, it was already late afternoon, and the terrain in which FAPLA disappeared was exactly the same dense bush that we encountered on our first attack on 59 Bde on 17 October. Hannes was not happy to let FAPLA escape, but the time of day and the odds against us convinced him.

At that stage, should we run into serious resistance, we would have been on our own. 61 Mech and 4 SAI were at Mavinga. 32 Bn (Cmdt Hartslief) was not close enough to be able to render support. Even if he had been close enough, it would have been very risky to commit all our forces on the western front. We retreated to the vicinity of the source of the Mianei. For the moment the G5's were safe from ground assault.





## **Actions on the Hube River - 16 November**



On 16 November, CGp C attacked FAPLA at the Hube source. Due to navigational difficulties, CGp C was not in the correct position and this resulted in a exposed northern flank at the source of the Hube.

We received orders to deploy as the flank force to prevent any interference from Vimpulo. We deployed as instructed. There were some reports that 59 Bde was moving from Vimpulo to the Hube where we were deployed, but we had no direct contact. We only received some over-drops from the actual fight to our west.

Late afternoon 4 SAI attempted to break contact. However, it was not an easy task. A rapidly growing concern was the position of 59 Bde, earlier reported as moving from the Chambinga. They were supposed to have made contact with Bravo by that time. They did not. Bravo moved east to form a mobile stopper line to cover the 4 SAI retreat. When 4 SAI disengaged from the target, they left behind a Rinkhals ambulance and a recovery vehicle. Bravo was ordered to go and recover these. Given the time of the day being late afternoon and our distance from the target, it would have meant a night operation. The plan was abandoned.











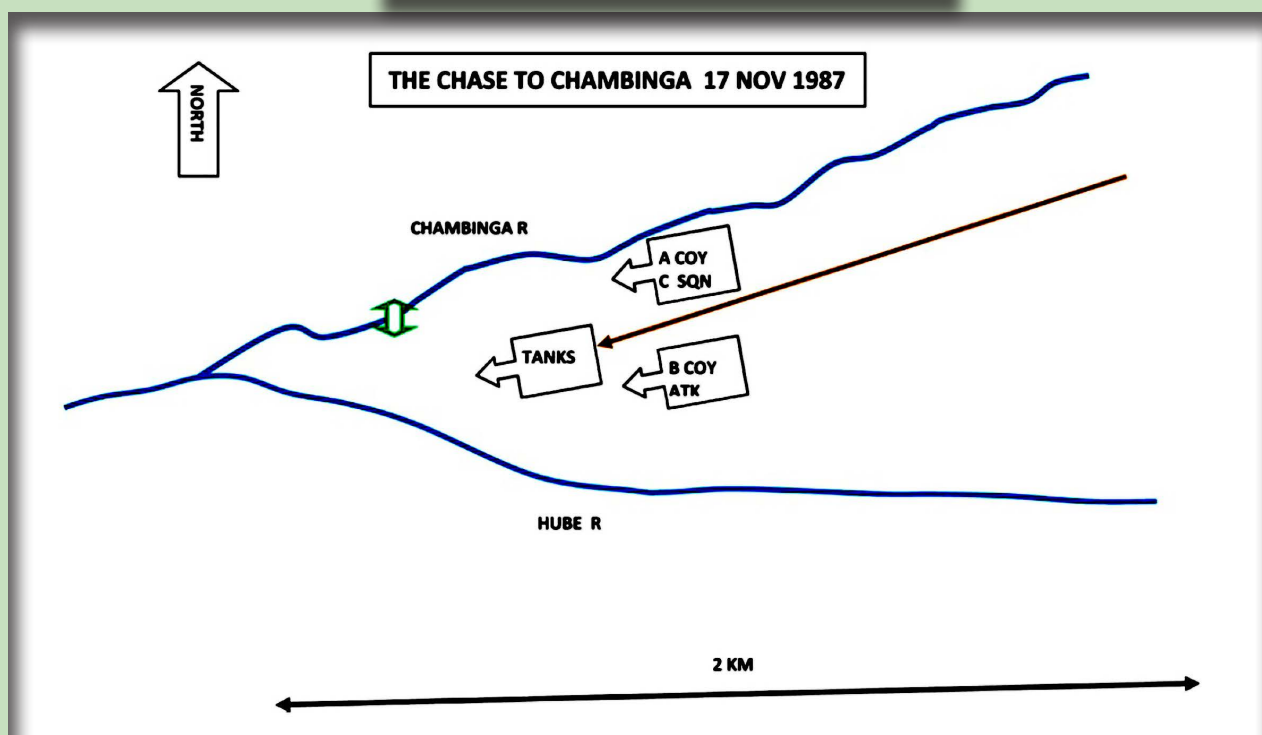


## The Chase to Chambinga - 17 November



That same evening we reported back to 61 Mech for the final push to the Chambinga Bridge the following morning. The tank squadron was in the lead, with UNITA deployed in a skirmishing formation. Bravo Coy/ATk deployed on the southern side of the axis of advance in an open formation. We advanced, but except for a few loose skirmishes on the UNITA tank-front, there was no contact made that necessitated our intervention. Our artillery maintained a high tempo of fire on the Chambinga bridge. It was clear that all FAPLA forces were west of the bridge. That night we went into a hide with 61 Mech.

The following day, we were informed that the operation was extended, but that this would not affect us. Ops Hooper would be fought by the relieve troops from the 1987 intake at the training units.









## Last Obstacles



The aim of Ops Hooper would be to destroy the FAPLA Bdes west of the Chambinga. To ensure a smooth transition between Ops Modular and Ops Hooper it was necessary to keep FAPLA under pressure. There was one last challenge for Bravo Coy/ATk.

It was required of 61 Mech to execute one final attack on the FAPLA Bdes on the high ground north of the Chambinga. The terrain was very difficult and the bush very dense. The very soft sand dunes worsened the situation and an attack with vehicles would have faced serious limitations. The enemy was close to their support base at Quito Cuanavale and a large pool of reserves could be deployed on short notice. They were in strong defensive positions with adequate equipment.

Cmdt Muller involved us in the planning of a night attack on those positions with on-foot infantry. Such an attack would have required leaving the Ratels behind in a hide. The infantry of A and B Coy would advance on foot through this dense bush and soft sand. Then we would engage an enemy in well-prepared trenches, with numbers far superior to our own. To my perception, that was a suicide mission. The whole concept was against all logic. Special reference was made to the operational readiness of our gas masks. I tried to reason with Cmdt Muller, but he was determined that the attack would take place. Risking my career, I informed him that, should he insist on the attack being executed, he himself must inform the infantry about this lunacy, and the unacceptable risks involved. During my career I learned to obey commands. However, I also learned through experience in Ops Askari and the exposure in Ops Modular up to that stage, that I also had a right to question certain decisions. Cmdt Muller was not pleased with my reluctance. The plan was abandoned.









## DAILY LIFE IN A HIDING PLACE



For those who hadn't experience being involved in a conventional force during war, thinks it was just fighting from dusk to dawn, and then again from dawn to dusk. That is removed from reality. One can be on a large battlefield where on the far side a fierce battle is being fought, whilst on your front, everything is quiet. The actual time spent on fighting is just a fragment of the time spent on the frontline. The rest of the time is spent on movement to the next place, or just to lie for days doing nothing. And this is the tough part of war!! Always vigilant and ready - and the ability to be at rest amidst vigilance. This was also true about Ops Modular.

*Just as we turn into animals when we go up to the line . . . so we turn into wags and loafers when we are resting. . . . We want to live at any price; so we cannot burden ourselves with feelings which, though they may be ornamental enough in peacetime, would be out of place here.*

*Erich Maria Remarque (All Quiet on the Western Front)*





The enemy were masters of the sky since they had more aircraft than we had and theirs were more sophisticated than ours. From September onwards we were harassed by sudden appearances of these enemy aircraft. Especially after 9 October when one of C Sqn's Ratels was destroyed by an air attack, we only move or change positions during the night (if possible). During daytime we would go under camouflage in a hiding place (hide). The form of such a hide was usually a big circle in densely vegetated area (when possible) and dispersed with Ratel intervals of about fifty meters (Depending on the terrain). With the 20 x Ratels of Bravo, the circumference could be up to 500 meters. Once the hide had been established and on foot security patrols returned to the perimeter, observation posts were established outside the hide (preferably a large tree or on the hide side of an adjacent open area). Under camouflage nets we then waited for the coming of darkness to move again. We changed position every night with a few exceptions when it was not practical to change. Alertness and boredom in such a hide were intimate companions. No cooking fires or noise were allowed. For heat we used our Esbit tablets. This rule also had exceptions. When fresh meat was supplied, one needed to make a fire.

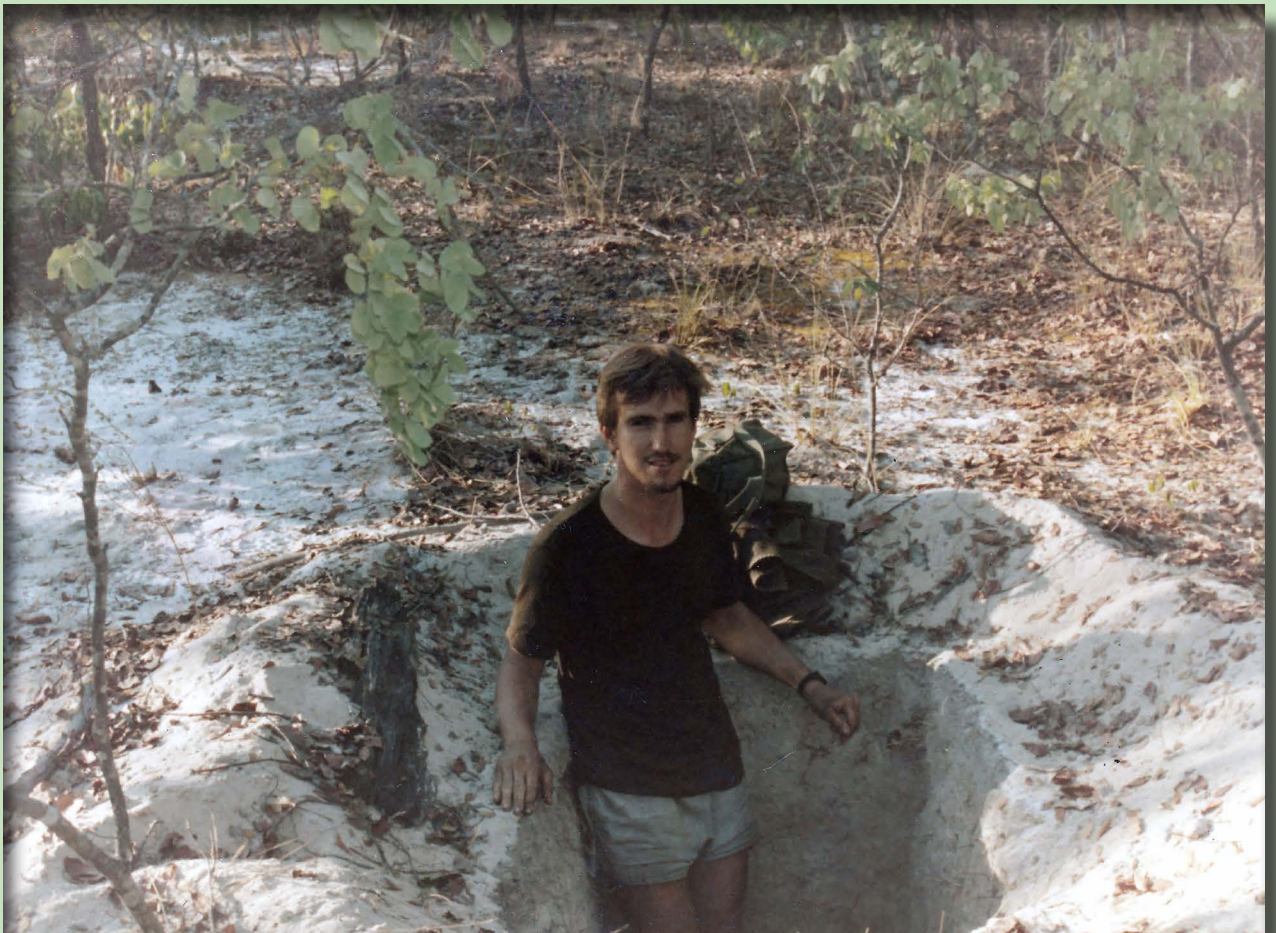




## Foxhole



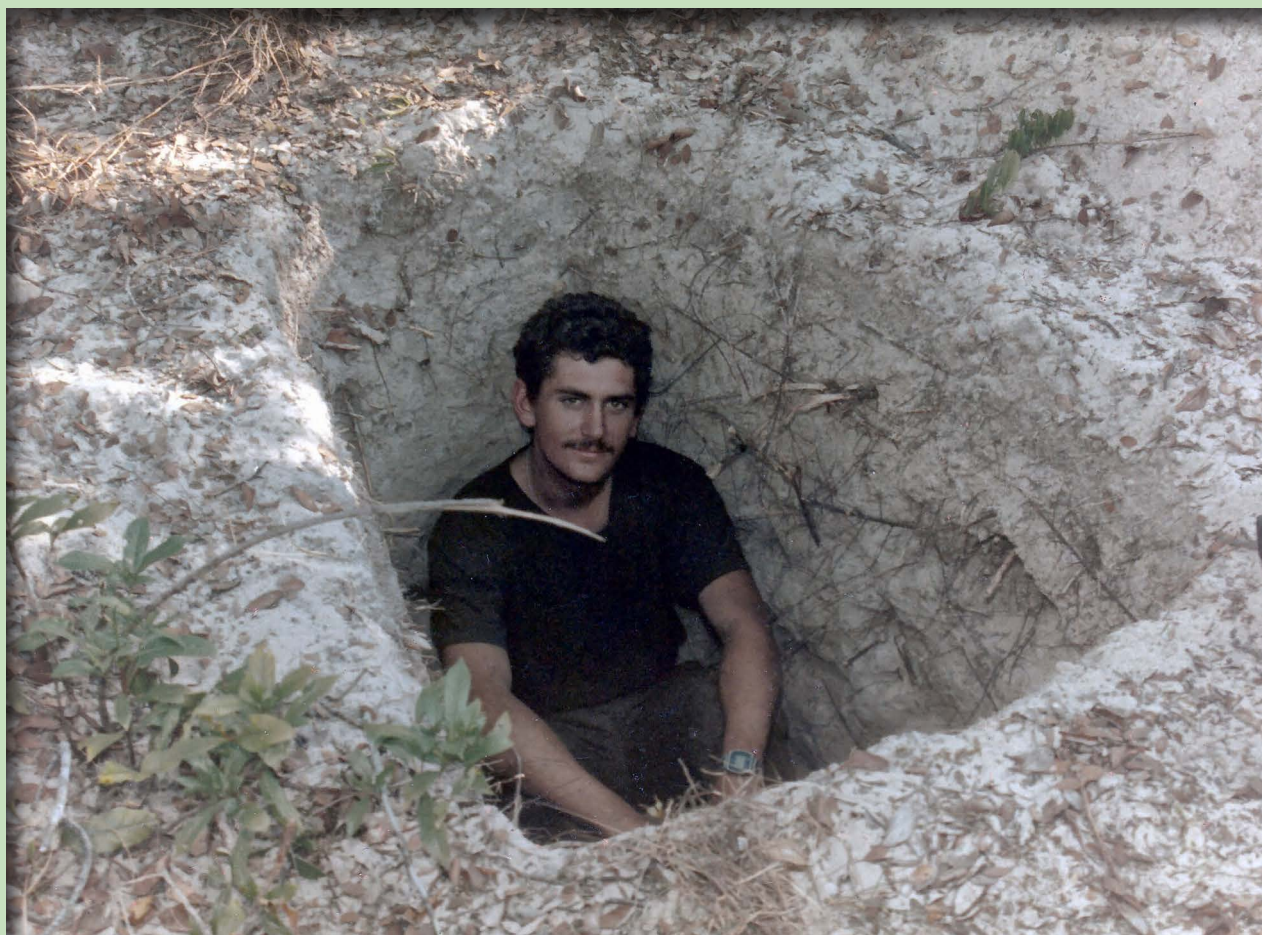














## Swimming in the Mavinga River

































































## Running the Bush Marathon



Everything happened so rapidly that the sudden lull in activities resulted in anxiety. To counter this, I decided to have a bush marathon being run on the outer perimeter of the 61 Mech open laager (a circle route of about 1 km) on 9 September.













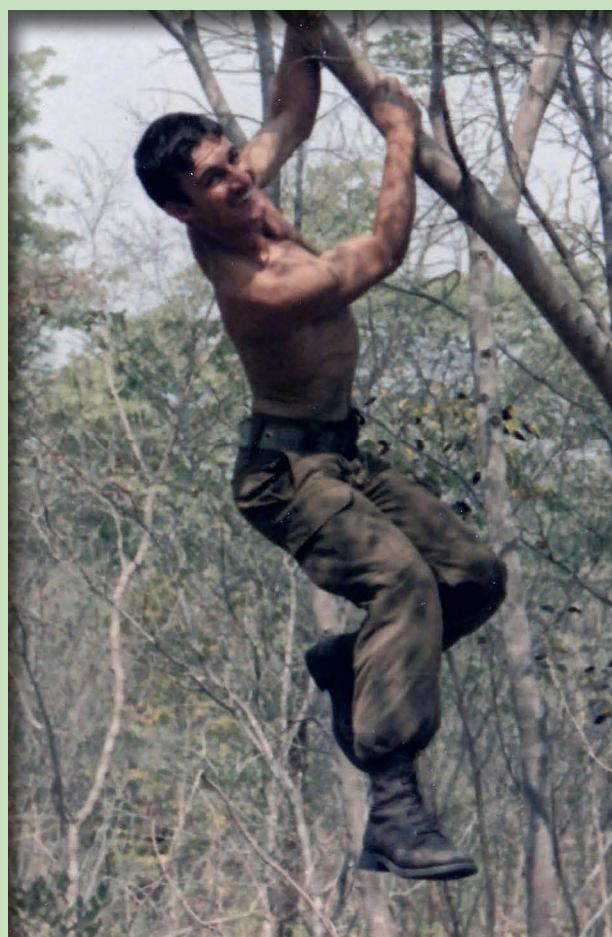
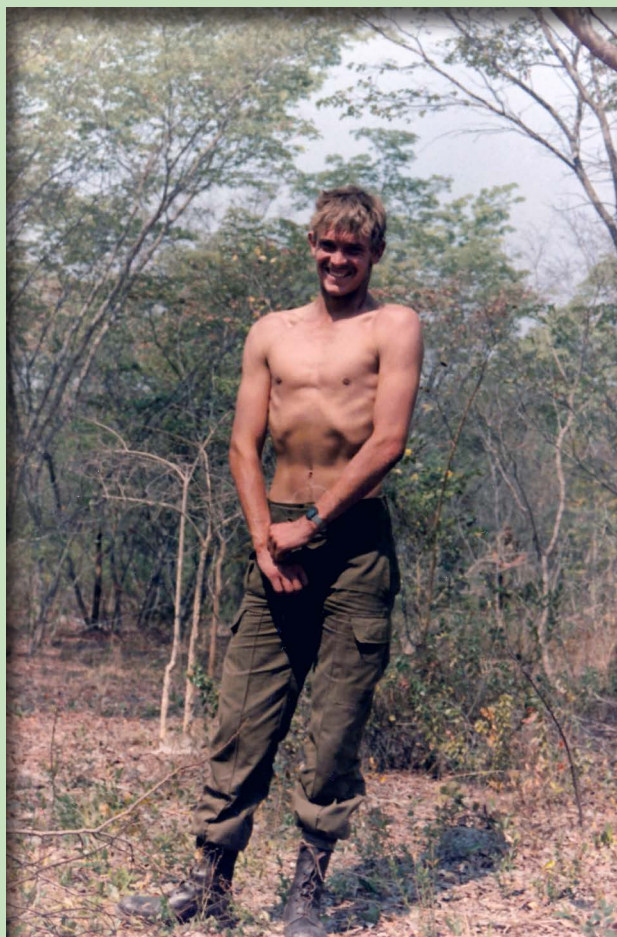




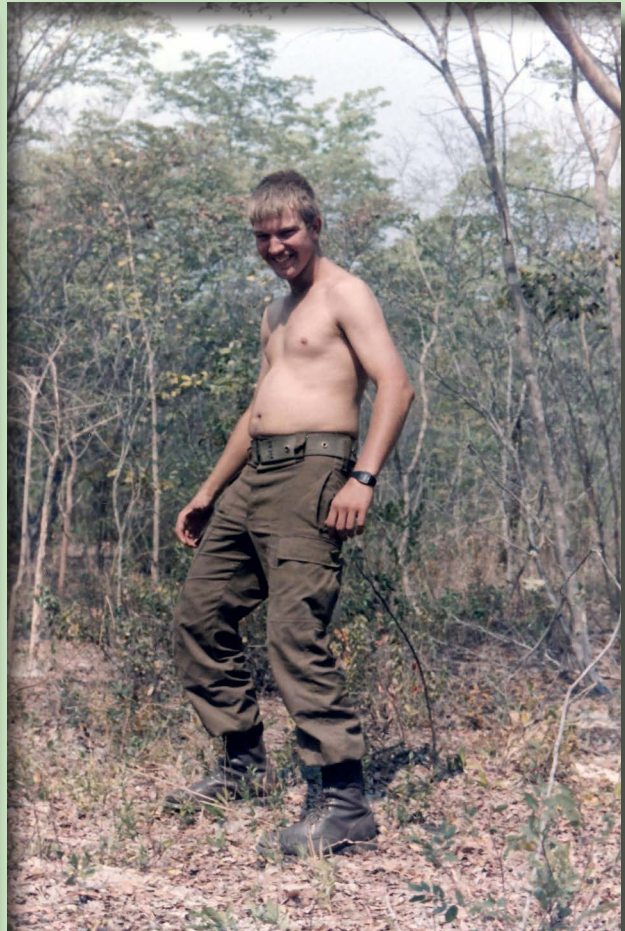
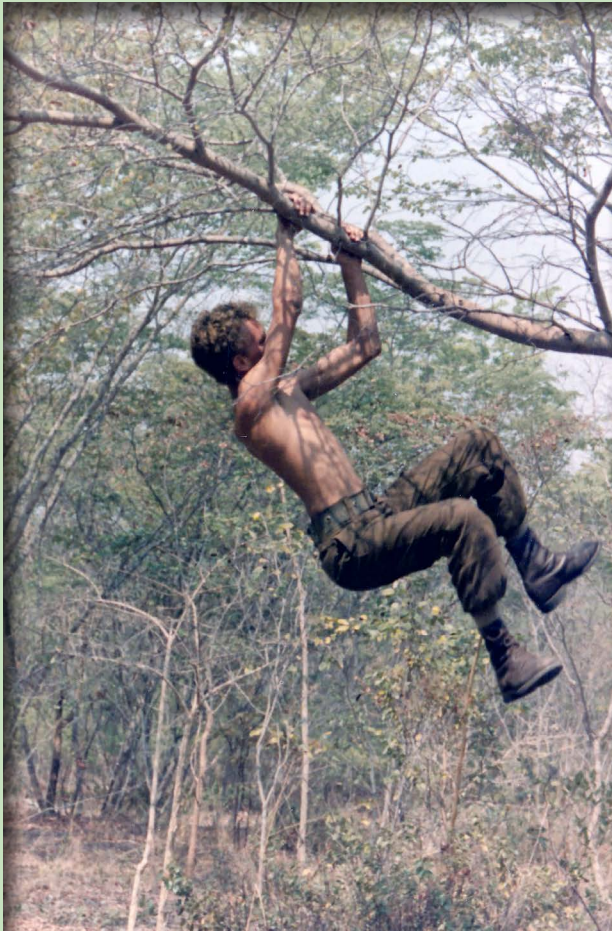




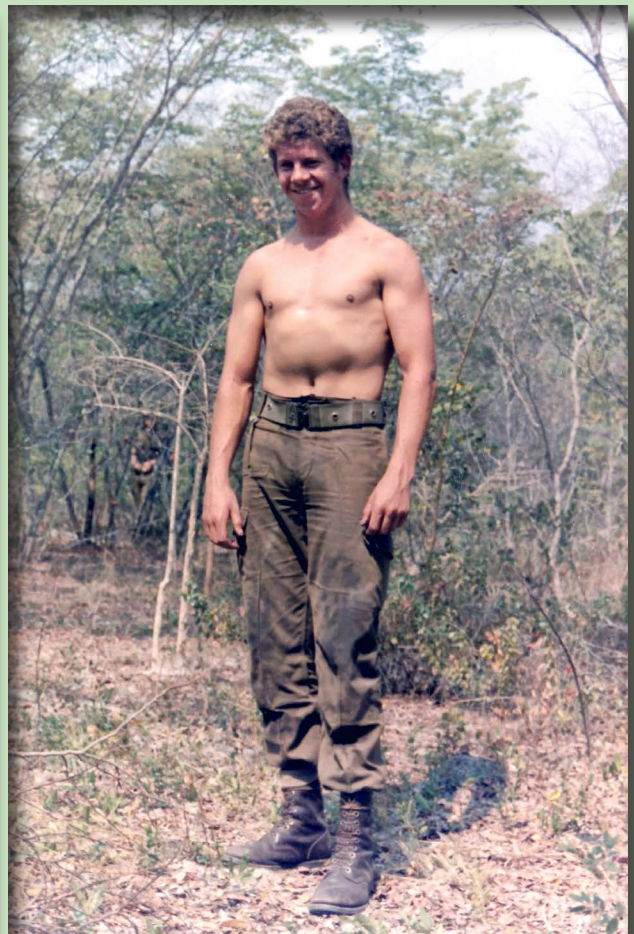
## Iron-Man Competition



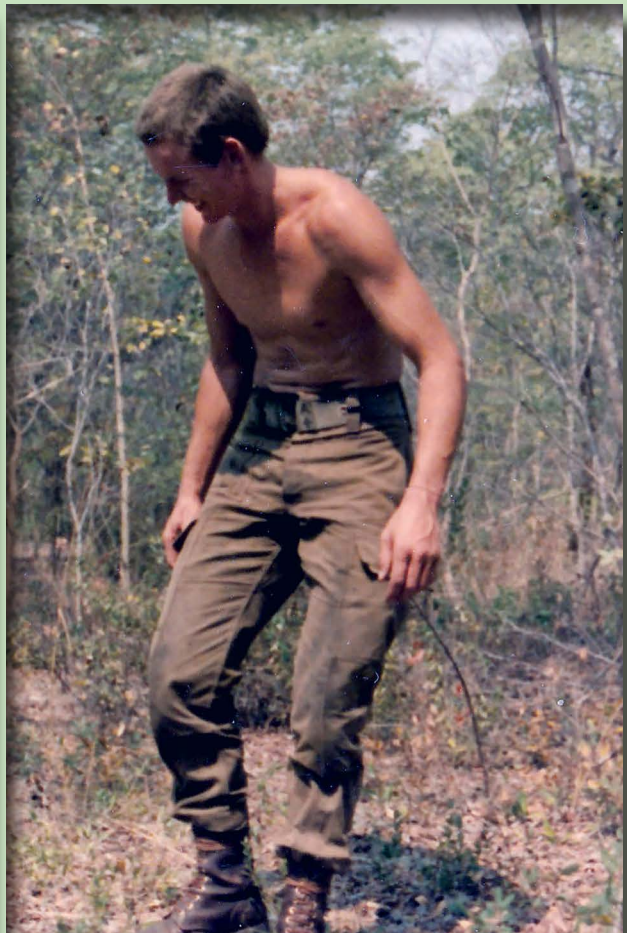
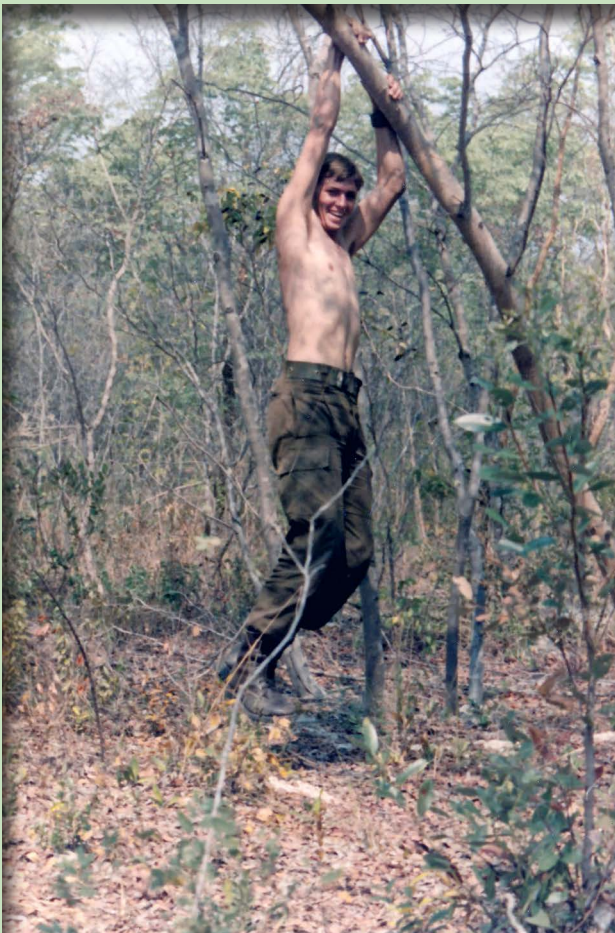




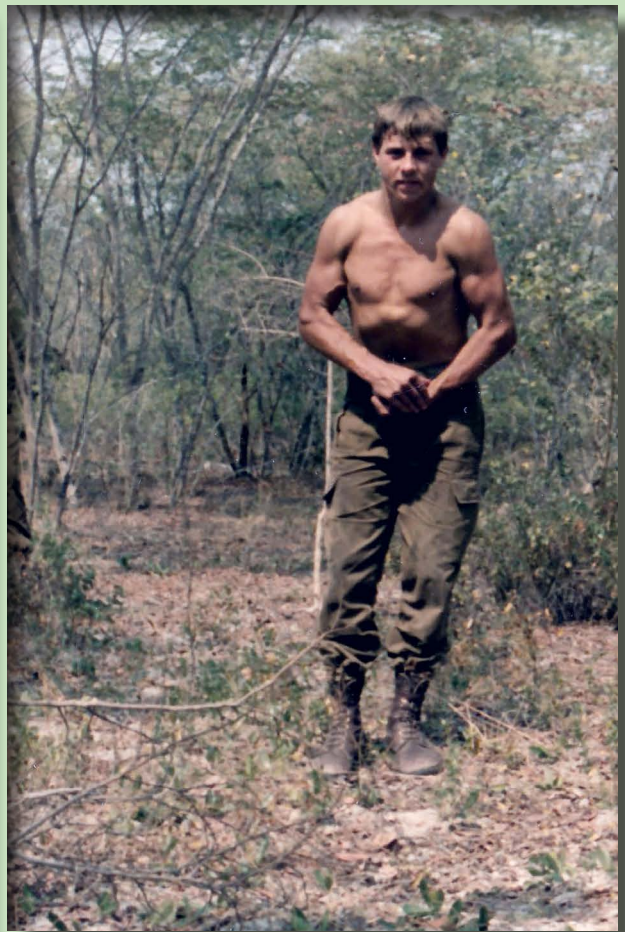


















## Digging for Water







*John McCrum recalls: “Being so far inside Angola logistics were a problem, fresh water in particular. One source of water was to dig in the Shona’s close to the rivers, this was done at night, a hole would be dug till we hit water, and this was then pumped into the water bunker along with a large helping of ‘chlorfloc’ (water purification tablets). This water was far from pure, the lower the level got in the bunker the muddier the water we were drinking. This led to a lot of case of ‘gippo-guts’. I suffered for over a week with this condition, a bad case of the runs and severe stomach cramps, no matter what I ate or drank it went straight through me. Eventually I was passing stinking black water only and spent my days in the foetal position under the shade of the nearest tree too weak to move. The ‘Tampax tiffies’ had run out of medicine to treat me, all they had left was Imodium (konkryt pille). I ate these like smarties. As a result of the gippo guts, toilet paper was scarce (it became known as ‘white gold’)”.*





## Washing and Showering



We were far from open water sources for washing. When we were near such a source, the enemy was there also. It was a rare occurrence that the A1 Echelon managed to bring enough water with for washing. Even drinking water was on strict rationing.



















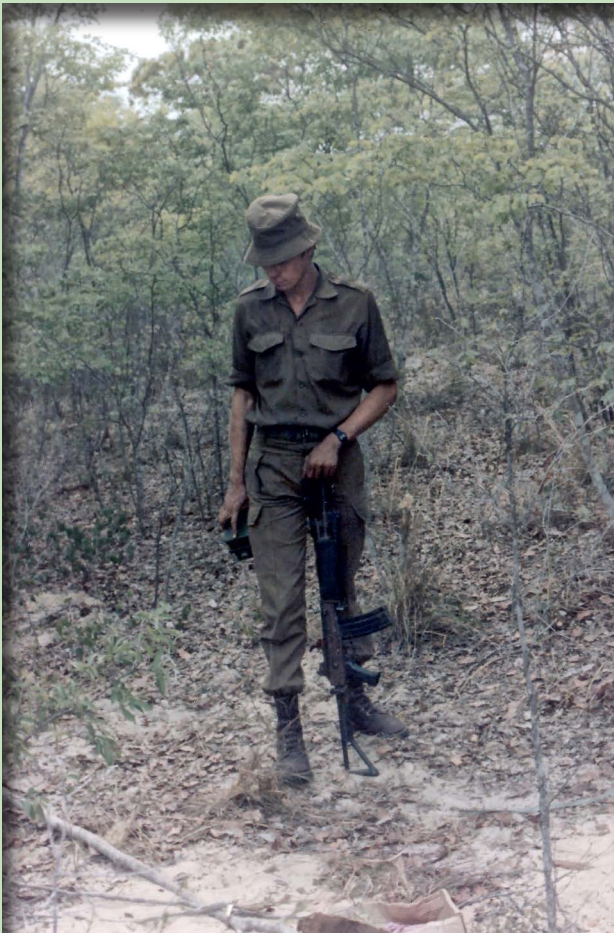












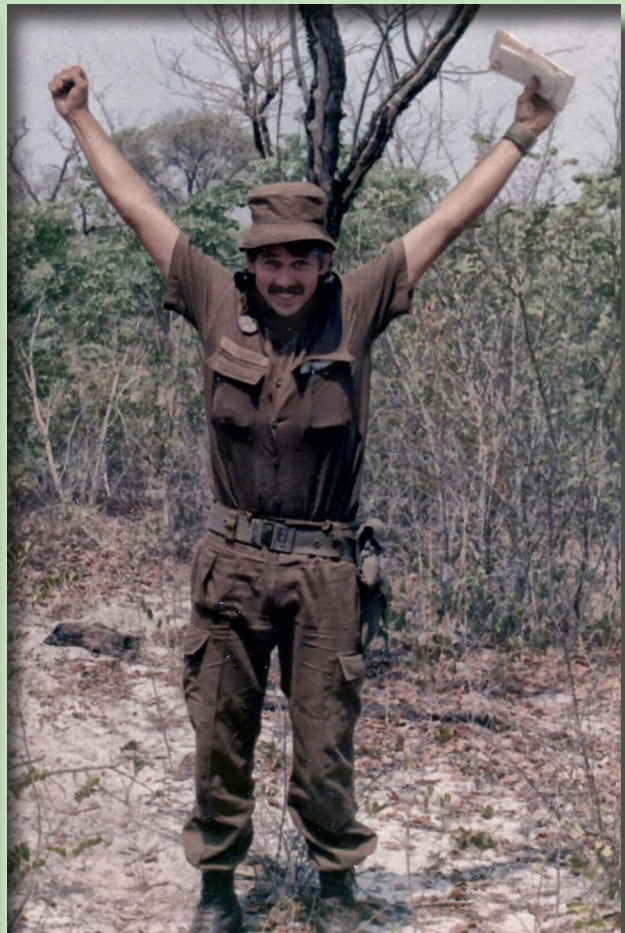


## Mail on the Front.

To receive news and parcels from home was an uplifting experience. Those who were lucky enough to get a parcel, willingly share with the others of his crew.









































































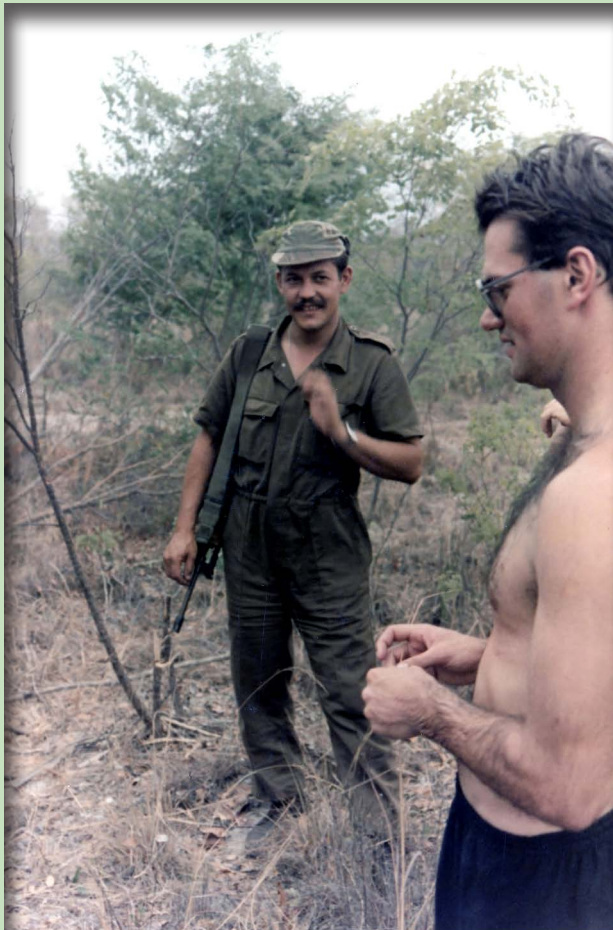
## Waiting























**John McCrum recalls:**

*Flies during the day and moths at night were in plague proportions. During the days everything was black with flies, any food or drink preparation invariably led to the food or drink liberally sprinkled with flies, in the beginning we would pick them out but towards the end they just got stirred into the mix. During the evening's fires were forbidden but on occasion we would ignore this if we were really hungry, the moths like the flies got stirred into the mix 'extra protein' yum!!*



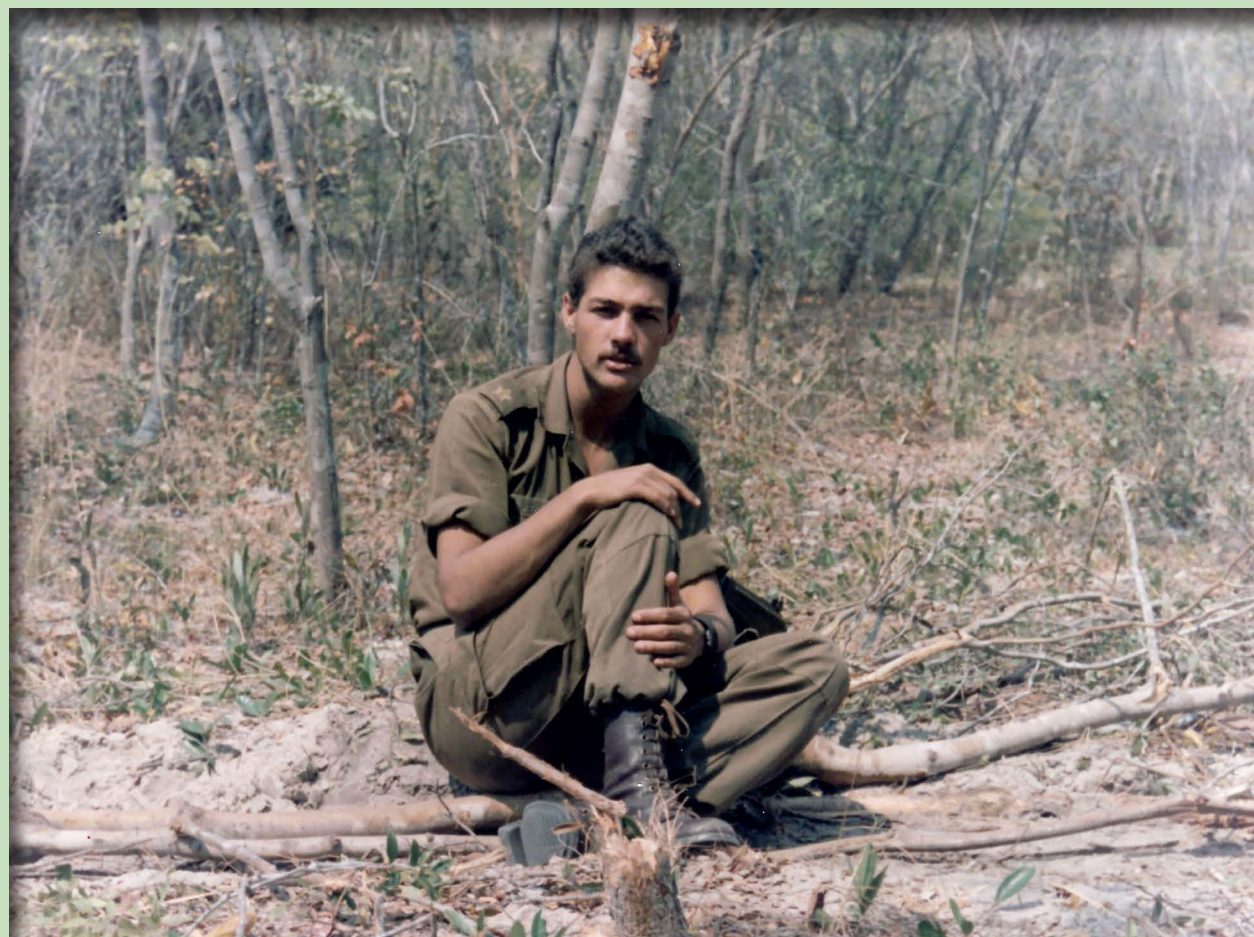
















**John McCrum recalls:**

*One of the biggest problems for us troops was boredom. Only a few guys brought books along so these were read 2 or 3 times by everybody, there were only a couple of decks of cards around which were jealously guarded and after a few weeks of heavy use they had fallen apart. Draughts and chess with super C's soon became boring. It was only natural that sooner or later some of the guys would get up to mischief.*

*Fire extinguishers became a source of amusement for 23C for a few days until the gas charge ran out. What we would do was take the plastic tub from the intravenous tube from the medic kit and slide it over the gas valve on the fire extinguisher inside the Ratel. The free end was put in your mouth while the valve is depressed, the gas is then sucked in the effect was quite euphoric, it caused a sort of black and grey chess board effect in front of your eyes (as if you've closed your eyes and squeezing them with your fingers) and you lost all co-ordination and sort of rendered you catatonic.*

*We would have competitions, we would sit in the Ratel doorway and suck on the gas, when we got to the point of being catatonic, we would jump out and see how far we could run. The record was about 5 meters!! before collapsing in a giggling heap, motor function completely gone. Thank God we never had a fire to deal with our extinguisher would have been useless*



















## War Diary

*A great river, ribbon of blue  
A line from east to west  
A weapon sight straight and true  
A diary yellowed and no longer at its best*

*A flood plain  
A cry of pain  
A trench with bodies filled  
Dead faces without consternation  
A Ratel wheel on which blood spilled  
A comrade's last conversation  
A thickly-wooded spot  
A burning Ratel witness bore  
A lesson from War we got  
A three-month spell or more  
A dark night with blood that flowed  
A long day's fires that glowed  
A bomb that detonates  
A mask of dust that resonates  
The long haul's end rewarding  
A line from north to south we haul*

*A sense of self-defrauding  
A tear that will not fall*

*So I learned of war  
Follow-up classes for a time or more  
On my soul it left a sadness cold  
That continually would out and be told*

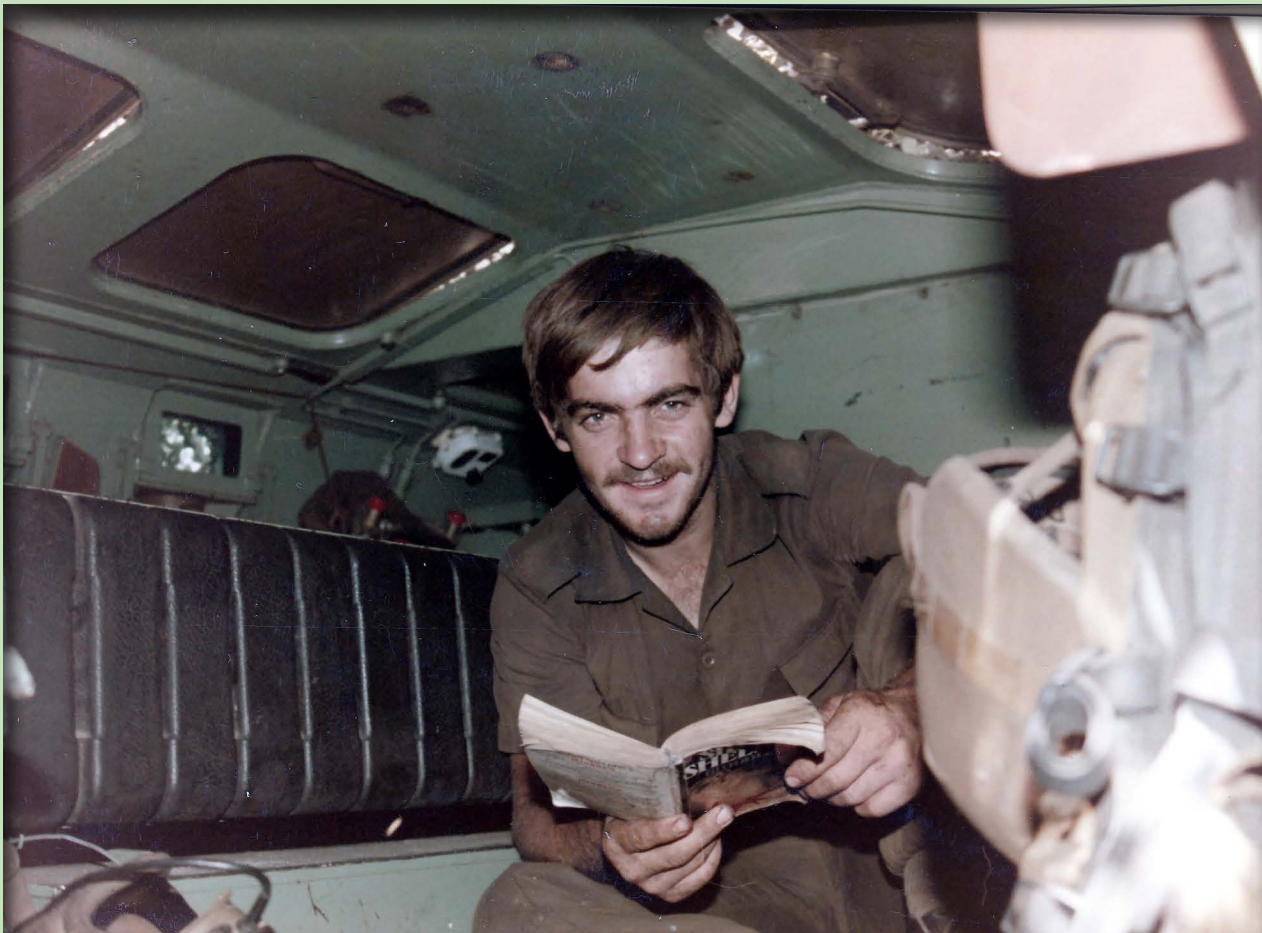
*On my own  
Of myself  
A stranger I have made  
If I could but take my diary apart  
And replace that part that will not fade*

*But I'm bound in and bound up smart  
In Ratel's walls of steel stable  
And in walls of flesh unable  
In diary pages yellowed and old  
Without looking back – my staff and comfort bold.*

*By Dawid Lotter - As translated by Genl Tony Savides*



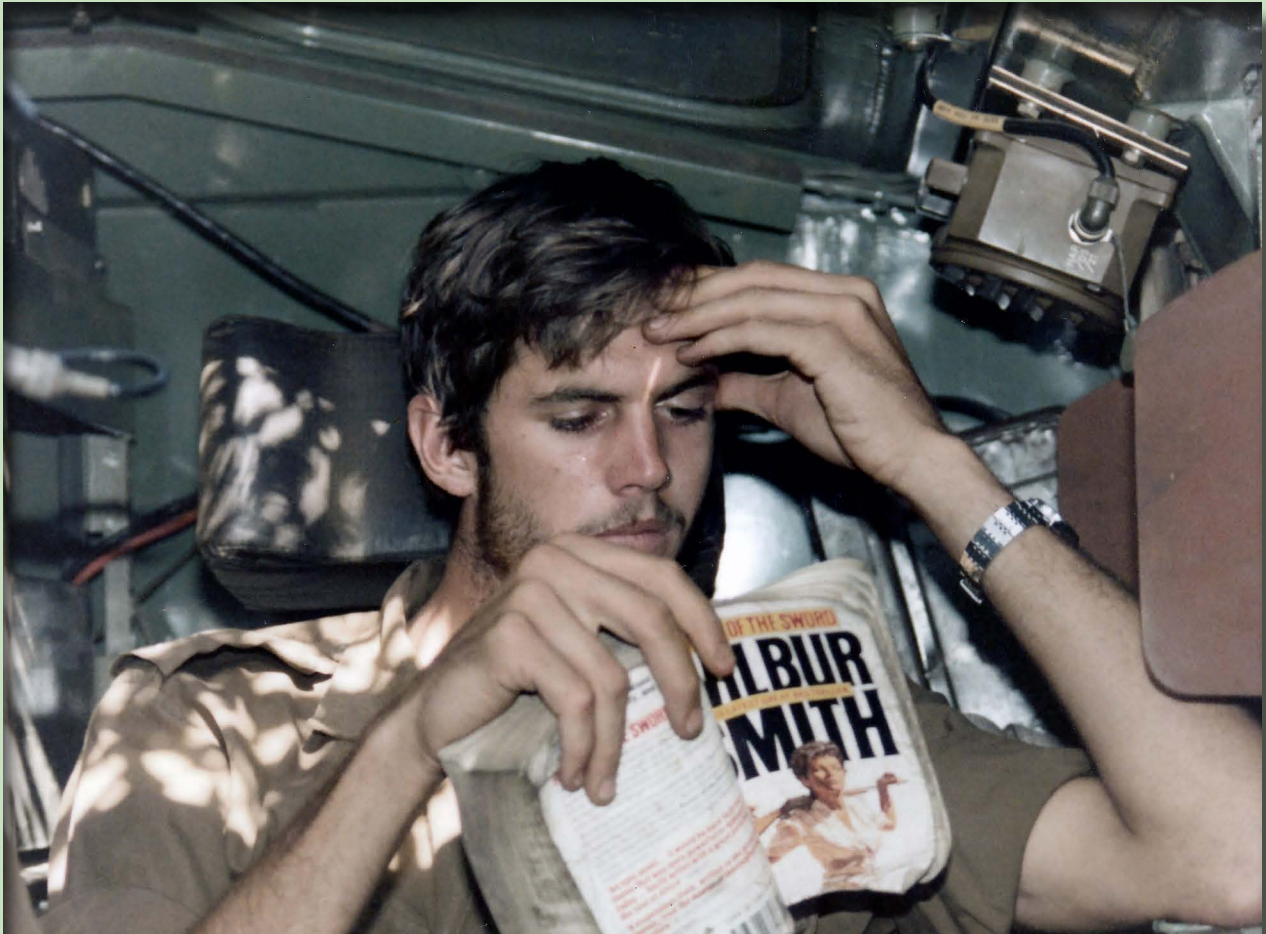








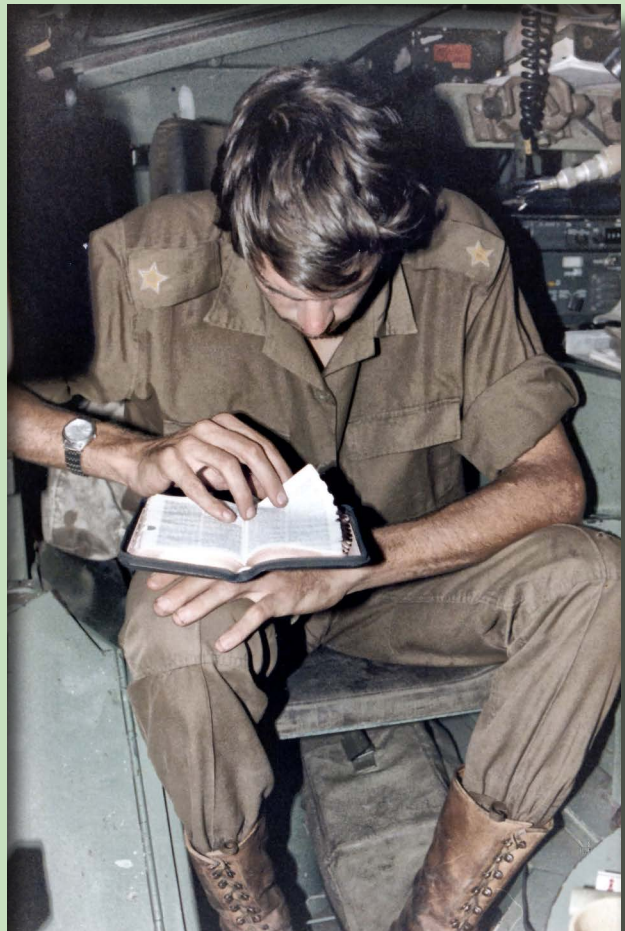




















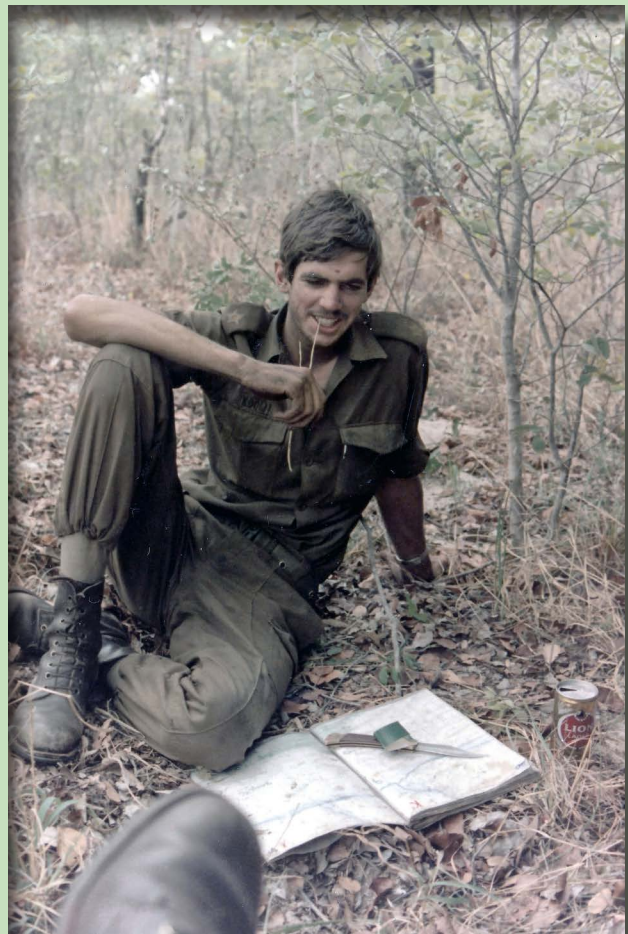


























**John McCrum recalls:**

*“Food for our time in Angola consisted of rat packs, eating tins of corned beef, mince and noodles, pickled fish, chocolate (Tarzan bars) wore off really quick. We began making ‘section stews’ everybody would pool their tins of food (except pickled and curried fish), ‘cheesies’ and ‘dog biscuits’. These would be cooked up in one pot and we’d all eat this. Super C’s to me are now draughts pieces or chessmen, we would draw pictures of chess pieces on the Super C’s and play chess or draughts.*

*Rat pack tea was the most disgusting thing we’d ever tasted, no one drank it. We did receive some fresh vegetables (well almost fresh) and some meat, by the time it had travelled from Rundu to Manvinga by air and up to us via dirt track in a Kwêvoël it was covered in maggots. This didn’t stop us, we cleaned the maggots off, cleaned the shovels we used for our ‘boskak’ and cooked the meat on an open fire as best we could, it tasted divine.*







**John McCrum recalls:**

*“Personal hygiene was also a problem with water being in such short supply baths/showers were very rare. Clothes washing was not an option so our browns were black to the point where we could scrap the accumulated muck off with a knife. Our skins were pretty much the same, instead of a suntanned brown we were a dirty black/brown. Again, the dirt could be scrapped off with a knife and we stank to high heaven. One of the guys in our section was quite a heavy sweater and he really stank, his feet sweated so much his boots were covered in white salt crystals, it got so bad inside the Ratel that we actually kicked him out of the Ratel and made him sit on top while we drove through the bush.*

*Eventually when we pulled into one laager, we made plans to have some sort of a wash. We dug a shallow rectangular hole in the dirt next to the Ratel and lined it with a bivvy. Each troop donated 2 x litre of their water rations and poured it into the ‘bath’ we then wrote our names on a piece of paper, put it in a container and it was drawn out, that was the order you would bath. The first guy got clean water to bath in, with each guy the water got dirtier to the point where it was hardly worthwhile climbing into the bath”.*

















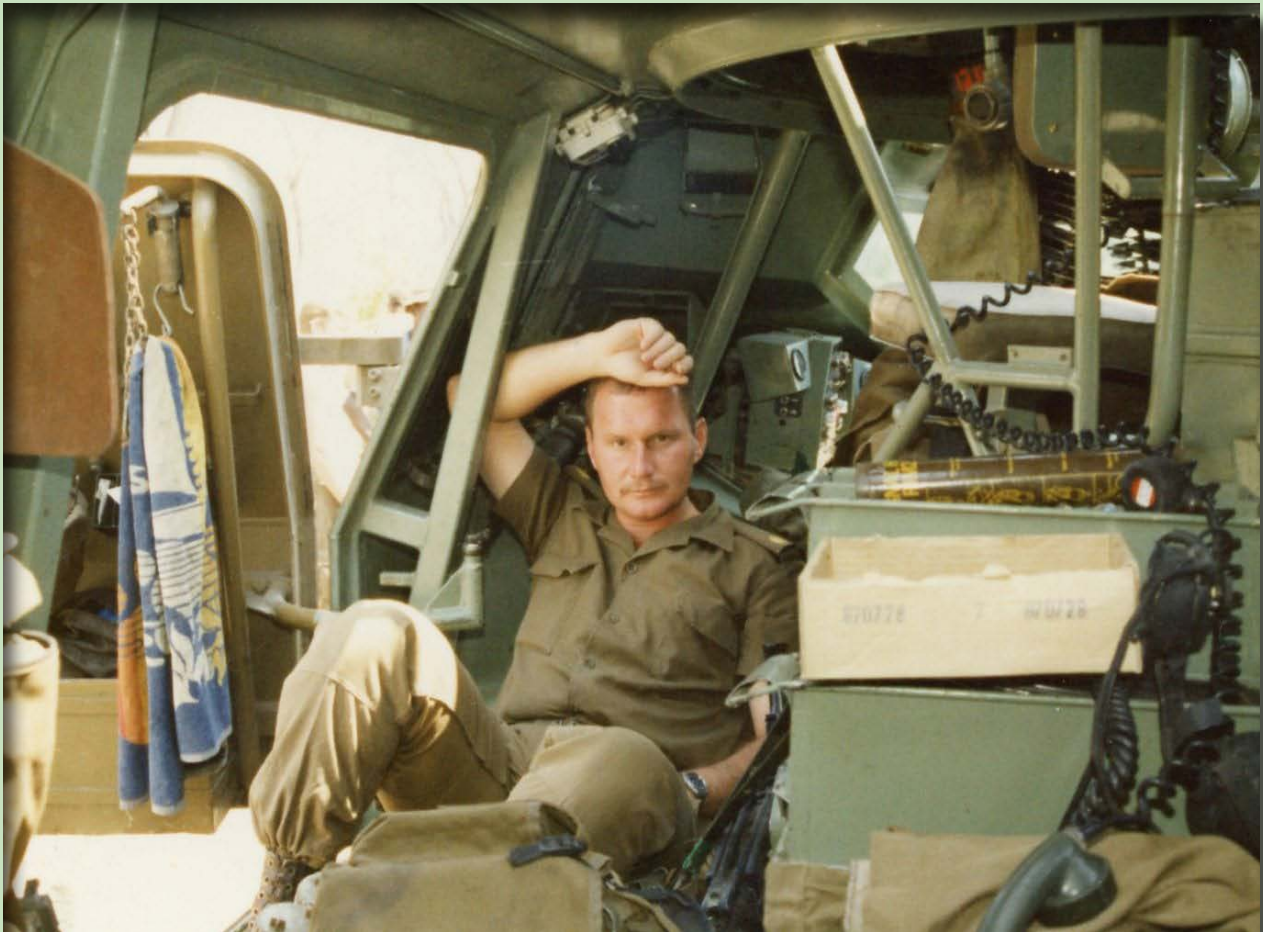
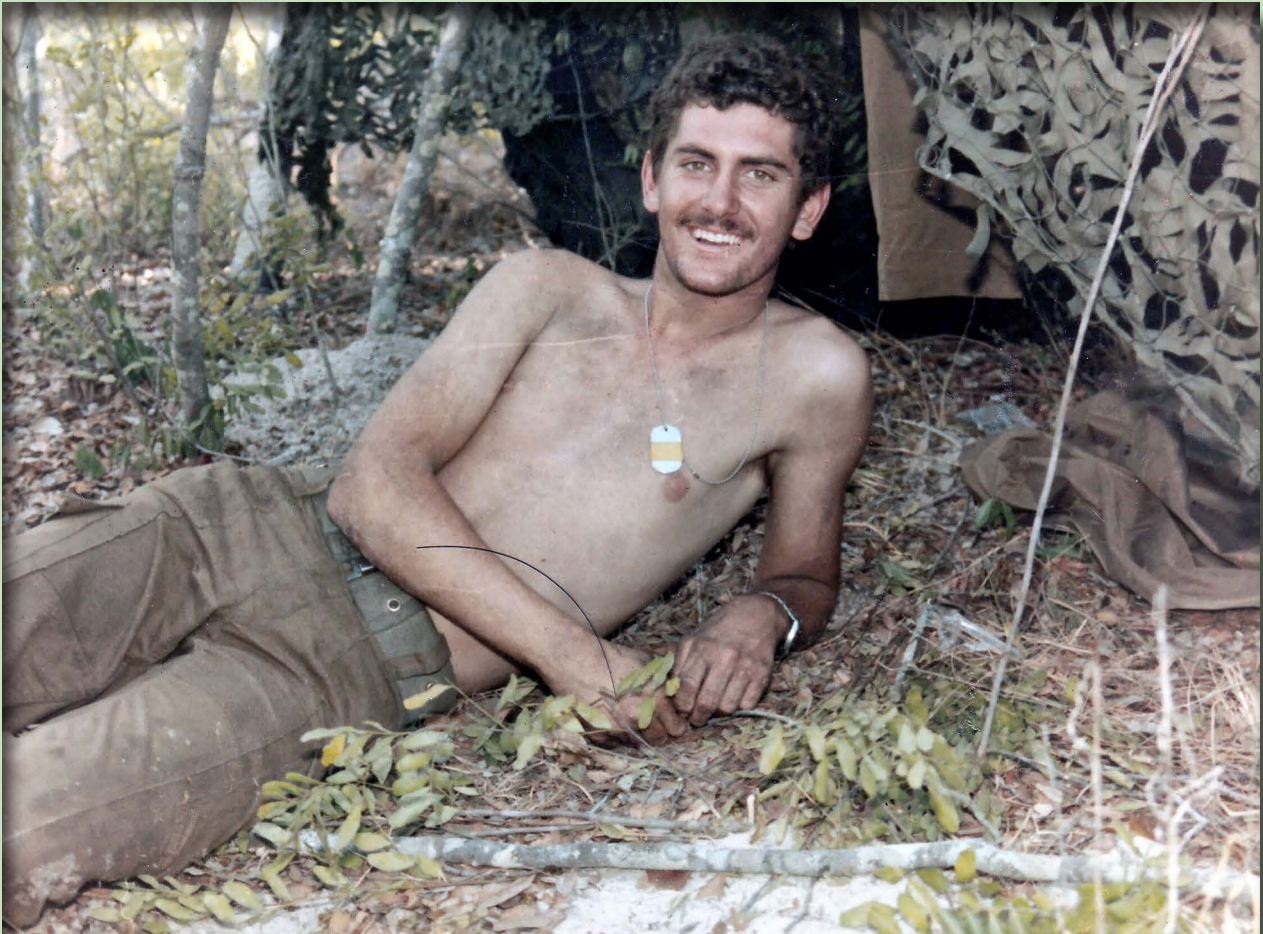








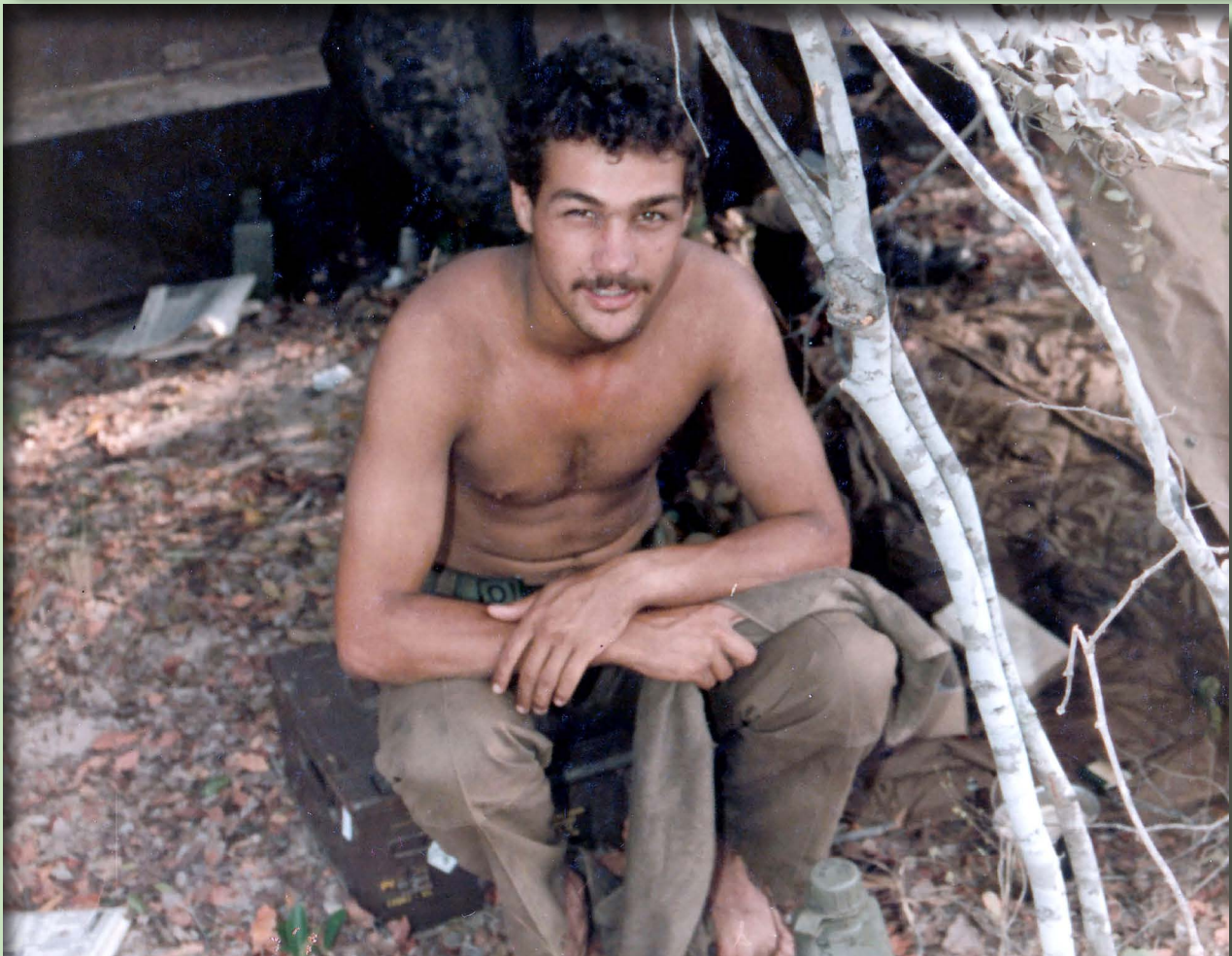


















## FINAL COUNT DOWN

### 30 NOVEMBER TO 11 DECEMBER

*Diary Theuns Cloete*

*30 November - 07:00 started cleaning all our equipment. Signed over our Ratels to the replacements. Received our Kieries from Genl Bock (UNITA) on a bush parade. Departed to the Mavinga airstrip awaiting our flight back to Rundu. Arrived in Rundu and transported back north about 2 kilometres north of the Angola border to the transit camp.*

*1 December - Showered a few times. Received brand new uniforms and boots. Evening a barbeque and a concert.*

*2 - Get authority papers for war collectibles to take home. Received an operational briefing.*

*3 - Paid visits to the doctors, dentists and "koptiffies".*

*4 - Genl Geldenhuys addressed us. Concert and barbeque.*

*5 - Received our Modular t-shirt and pen. Departed on Samil 100's to Grootfontein, then to Tsumeb. We were 60 packs per Samil. At Tsumeb the 61 Mech ladies club treated us with cake and soft drinks. We arrived at Omuthiya at dusk.*

*6 to 8 - Handing in of equipment.*

*9 - Departed to Tsumeb for the final parade.*

*10 - Overnight in Grootfontein transit camp.*

*11 to 12 - Flights back to South Africa.*





## From Mavinga to Rundu



By late November we returned to an assembly area near Mavinga. We cleaned our equipment and prepared to hand over our responsibilities to the relief troops from 1 SAI Bn. The handing and taking over went smoothly. Bravo Coy/ATk had a final parade where the “Ouman staff” was presented to them by Genl Bock from UNITA.



## The Legacy of the Bravo “Ouman Kierie”

Bravo decided in 1987 to get an “Ouman” staff manufactured as a symbol of their “Ouman” status. (“Ouman” or “Oumanne” (plural) translate to “Old Man/Old Men” and the status was achieved when passing the traditional 40 days mark before clearing out of the army.)





**The staff had to conform to the following specification: Each one must have a unique serial number. The head must be round and made of metal – thus symbolising the Bravo Coy firepower and combat ability. The 61 Mech Bn Gp emblem had to appear on the one side and the Bravo Coy emblem on the other.**

**The shaft linking the head and the base must be of a hard, precious wood. The balance point must be directly below the head to represent reaction speed and control. The base had to be strengthened with a metal shoe to confirm Bravo's continued preparedness. It had to be a symbol of the motto: "Veni, Vidi, Vici".**

**Manufacturing of the "Ouman Staff" commenced. This was done by Mr Barry van Niekerk. The cost was partly covered by the members of Bravo Coy and partly by Mr van Niekerk. Some members could not afford the cost and therefore did not receive one. It was only issued to members of Bravo coy, with the exception of Cmdt Smit, RSM Kemp and selected members of 61 Mech Bn Gp. The initial idea was that the handover parade should coincide with the traditional "40 days" function.**



Due to Op Modular this could not happen though. The parade actually took place on 30 November 1987, near Mavinga. Maj Genl Meyer was invited to do the handover. The certificates were already printed when it transpired that he could not attend the ceremony due to other commitments. I then personally sent an invite to Dr Savimbi to do the handover. Due to his vulnerability so close to Mavinga he sent his Chief of Staff - Logistics, Genl J Bock, to do the handover on his behalf. The consignment was packaged in ammunition crates at Tsumeb and then delivered to the front by RSM Kemp. Once there, CSM Smit placed it under strict custody until the handover date.



Due to the unique numbering of the staffs, it was difficult to determine who would receive which number. I reserved number one for myself. The rest were made to stand upright in the soft sand; in the format of 3 rank line-ups in the sub-sub unit order. Due to the fact that Genl Bock only had one arm it would have been difficult for him to receive it from me first, before handing it over.

CSM Smit formed up the parade and marched them to their positions behind the staffs. Cmdt Smit received his staff from me first. Then Genl Bock, accompanied by Cmdt Smit and myself, moved through the ranks and handed the staff to each member. All the other sub units were invited to be spectators.

Genl Bock thanked the SADF for their contribution, with a special word of thanks to each individual soldier. His message was that those that were about to return to South Africa should not forget those that remained behind. The world-play implied: those that will continue fighting and those who had paid the highest price in the war.









































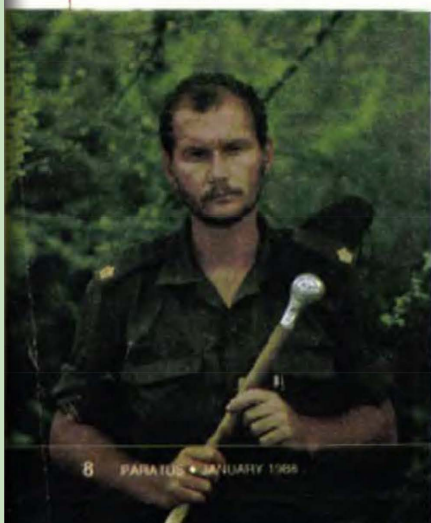








## Knopkierie deel van unieke tradisies



**MAJ DAWID LÖTTER**, bevelvoerder van 'n kompanie, met 'n baie spesiale knopkierie. Dié knopkieries wat aan elke lid van sy kompanie tydens hul teenwoordigheid in Angola deur genl Jeremy Bock, hoof van staf logistiek van Unita, oorhandig is, is maar een van die baie tradisies wat maj Lötter geïnsleer het om sy kompanie se moreel hoog te hou.

Elkeen van hierdie kleries is genommer en het 'n staalknop waarop die kompanie en eenheid se kentekens aangebring is. By die kompanie se basis is die kompanie se tente en lyne ook uitgeleë volgens die voorskrifte wat vir die Romeinse legioene gegee is. Verder spog die kompanie met sy eie wimpel, ook geskoel op dié van die Romeine.

Volgens maj Lötter is daar te min outentieke militêre tradisies en hy hoop om

ander subeenhede aan te vuur om met oorspronklike tradisies na vore te kom. Dat dié kompanie se moreel hoog gehou is deur hul tradisies, is bewys deur hul uitstekende vertoning tydens 'n geveg toe hulle drie tenks en ander Fapla-toerusting vernietig het.

















## Southward Bound



We departed to the airstrip at Mavinga and were airlifted to Rundu. The airstrip was muddy and very short for such large aircraft. We watched in amazement as the flights came in and departed. All flights were by night. As soon as an aircraft approached the runway, UNITA troops torched the improvised tins of diesel, to mark the edges. The new troops then disembarked from the back ramp of the aircraft. It must have been quite intimidating to them - the darkness, the longhaired and bearded “oumanne”. Then the old troops filled up in a line, were counted and embarked. As soon as the quota had been reached the ramp would immediately start to close. The last soldiers were literally sitting on the ramp. Then came the anticipation for the take-off and the relief when we were off the ground. After about an hour we landed at Rundu.

*John McCrum recalls: “When we arrived back at Mavinga the ‘row-ers’ or replacements were there to meet us to take over the Ratels, at least the drivers and gunners were, over the next few days they would get the Ratels ready to carry on the operations against FAPLA. I can only imagine what they must have thought when they saw us lot climbing out the vehicles, rough, unwashed, filthy stinking, unshaven (‘armpits with eyeballs’ was one term I heard to describe us). The looks on their faces were a mixture of awe, shock surprise and fear. One of the parting comments I heard as we left them ‘julle gaan kak daar bo’ didn’t fill them with much confidence. We climbed on board the ‘Flossie’ crammed in like sardines, kit and bodies everywhere, nobody wanted to be left behind, we left Mavinga at 03:00 on 1st Dec. We flew into Rundu from there we were loaded into Kwêvoëls and taken back across the border to a transit camp just inside Angola.”*

*Andrew McManus (A Coy) recalls: “We flew out from a makeshift dirt runway in the night. There were UNITA people who ran up and down lighting these burning lamps to indicate the runway. The plane was one of those with the ramp at the back. We were standing in a line with one of the crew counting us out: “Go, go, go, stop!” I was the cut off, while my mate Mark Day was one in front. As they ran forward, Mark grabbed me by the front of my jacket and into the plane I went. We were packed in there in total darkness. Being last in, we were literally sitting on the ramp.”*





*Johann Nothnagel (1988) recalls: "I was in the group that took over from you guys in 1987 at Mavinga. We flew in the previous night and as we got off the Flossie a G5 which exploded were loaded. We walked a few km's from the base and slept right next to the road. The next morning we took over the Ratels from the guys that were leaving for the transit camp. We were amazed at how dirty and rough looking these guys were (remember we just came from training in Lohathla)."*









## Transit Camp Rundu



From Rundu we were driven back to the transit camp, about 2 km inside Angola. When I arrived at the “defusing” camp, prior to the arrival of the bulk of the troops, I was not impressed. The infantry camp commandant was nowhere to be found. When at last I found him, he was not very sober.

The Medical Service Arm (SAMS) were responsible to conduct and manage the medical processes. They supplied doctors, dentists and psychologists. The latter was supposed to be the main role players. The rules were short and sweet. No separate accommodation for sub units. All would be issued with new clothes. The bar was opened and you could drink till you drop. No disciplinary actions will be processed. In short, there were no rules and however you interpreted it was up to each individual’s discretion. I thought: “Wow, this is a troop heaven and a control hell”. I decided to go with the flow.

In my opinion this exercise was the greatest defeat of the SAMS (South African Medical Service) ever. The bunch of psychologists started what was intended as a noble effort, but it was just an interesting outing to them. I was informed that it was a SAMS operation and that I should not interfere. “Great”, I thought. It was around 11 o’ clock in the evening when one of the psychologists stormed into my tent and requested that I get my troops under control. The lot got into a fight – Artillery against Infantry, Armour against Infantry, etc. I just turned over and went back to sleep. I can’t remember the value of the band equipment that was destroyed, but it was a lot.

Over the next day or two the hung-over troops were sent through the series of (SAMS) tents to be “de-stressed”. Unnecessary incriminating reports were placed on file. In my entire military career (17 years Permanent Force and 10 years Citizen Force) I have never seen such a totally humiliating situation, from any right-minded person’s perspective, than what happened there. I believe this is where the expression “SOMFU” (Self Organised Military F\_ck Up) rightly attained its ultimate meaning.

*Jaco Swanevelder recalls: “We all knew it was just a matter of time before the sh\_t would hit the fan. It was started by 32 Bn’s armour men. They were aggrieved by the banners praising the 61 Mech virtues; while there were no banners for 32 Bn. Unnecessary to explain why the 61 Mech men took offence at the sh\_t remarks... Alcohol knows no limits!”*



*John McCrum recalls: "In this camp we were told to hand in all our old clothing, sleeping bag, webbing, boots etc (we kept our rifles) we were issued with nice clean, fresh clothes and for the first time in months we were able to shower with soap and shampoo. It took quite a few showers with lots of scrubbing over several days before we looked clean. During our time there we were given intelligence debriefing and examined by psychiatrists 'koptiffies'. We were herded into a tent as a section and asked a series of questions to which we gave some half-arsed answers, told the doctor this was a waste of time and left the tent a few minutes thereafter. The first couple of days beers were freely available a lot of the guys were getting absolutely legless and out of control after which the beers were rationed. After what we'd been through there was a lot of pent-up aggression anger, fear etc, most of the guys were just blowing off steam, only natural."*



*Paul Ronge recalls: "After the fighting a couple of the drunken guys became hungry and plucked some chefs out of bed to cook some food. They obviously refused but after a couple of threats they realized they would get trouble and obliged. Concerning the shrinks, some of the guys just told them that they are not in the mood for such sh\_t."*





*Dawid Momberg recalls: "We were queuing to buy beer. When Bester asked for a case of beer the rookie corporal behind the counter told him he was only allowed to buy two. I can still remember Bester's reply, in a manner that only he could say it: "F\_ck you corporal, hang tight, I am going to call someone." He got his case of beer, and I mine. I took my case of beer and went to sit in front to watch the concert. And who the heck came to sit next to me? Nobody else but General Geldenhuys and Sergeant Major Holiday! After a heck of an initial fright we had lots of conversation and he had a beer with me."*

*Johan van Niekerk recalls: "We got everything new in the transit camp. New Browns, T-Shirts, sleeping bags and jockeys! There were doctors, dentists and then social workers and the damned psychologists. They continuously wanted to know: "How did it feel when....?" SADF (SADF general store, also selling alcohol) was the winner, and the band with girls – which we haven't seen for months. The best de-mob was the case of beer, steaks on the coals and chatting with our mates – worth much more than the "shrinks"! Then also the Kwê 100's with new troops on their way for Ops Hooper... Oh, we knew what was waiting, they didn't!"*



# DIE STRYD IN ANGOLA

Artikels en foto's:  
Kapt André van de Venter  
Wm Gerrie Smit  
Wm John Dwyer

**J**ULLE het hard geveg, goed geveg en gewen! Dit is vir my 'n eer om hier te wees en aan julle te sê baie, baie dankie dat julle Suid-Afrika en Suidwes-Afrika 'n veiliger plek gemaak het om in te woon."

Doodse stilte het geheers terwyl die Hoof van die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag, genl Jannie Geldenhuys, terugkerende soldate van die gevegsfront by 'n versamelpunt in die suide van Angola toespreek het. Dit was duidelik dat die manne hoe agting en respek vir hom het.

Na die woorde van genl Geldenhuys het hy sy toespraak onderbreek en almal teenwoordig versoek om vir 'n paar sekondes op te staan en aan diegene te dink wat in die oorlog die hoogste tol betaal het.

Hy het hervat: "As ek sê ek wil julle ver-  
eer, wil ek julle nie heuning om die mond  
smeer nie. Julle wat hier sit, het die afgelope  
tyd meer gesien en ervaar as baie soldate  
van die Eerste en Tweede Wêreldoorloë en  
ander mense wat roem op hul oorlogserva-  
ring. Min mense sal weet watter fisieke en  
emosionele vermoënis julle deurgemaak  
het. Julle was deel van diegene wat die ge-  
skiedenis en verloop van hierdie gebied be-  
paal."

**M**ET verwysing na beskuldigings dat  
Burgermaglede en dienspligtiges  
voorgestoot word in die stryd, het genl Gel-



'n Groot skare terugkerende troepe het aan genl Jannie Geldenhuys se lippe gehang toe hy hulle kom bedank het by die versamelpunt in Angola.

## 'Julle het hard geveg, goed geveg en gewen!'

Paratus



4 PARATUS • JANUARY 1988

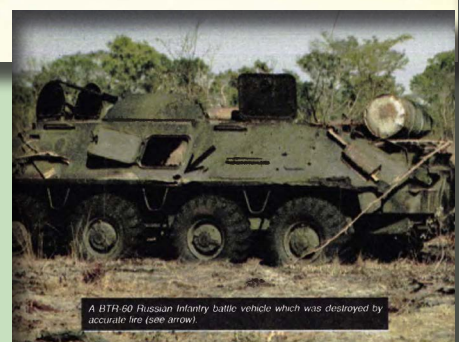
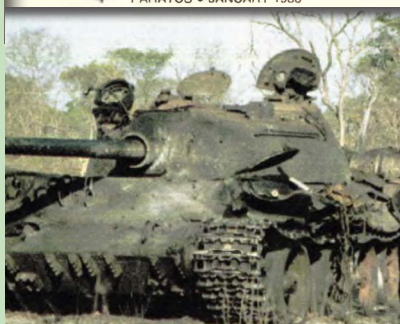
denhuys gesê dat dit van alle waarheid ont-  
bloom is. "Ons het as 'n span saamgewerk,  
ongegag of jy Staande Mag, Burgermag of  
dienspligtig is."

### Redes

Die Hoof van die Weermag het ook in duide-  
like taal aan die manne die redes vir Suid-  
Afrika se betrokkenheid in die oorlog in die  
suidooste van Angola verstrek.

Hy het daarop gewys dat Suid-Afrika dik-

Genl Jannie Geldenhuys, Hoof van die  
SA Weermag (links), staan by kapt P.J.  
Cloete (staande regs) en 'n paar van sy  
manne wat betrokke was in gevegte in  
Angola. Soortgelyke plakkaat, soos die  
een waarby hulle staan, het orals in die  
versamelpunt gestaan om aan die troepe  
erkenning te gee vir hul heldhaftige op-  
tredes tydens Operasie Modular in An-  
gola.



A BTR-60 Russian Infantry battle vehicle which was destroyed by accurate fire (see arrow)



# Soos 'n oase in woestyn ná die gevegsfront



wels uitgekryt word as die destabiliseerder van die gebied, maar die vraag kan gevra word watter belang Rusland en Kuba in die gebied het. "Ons het immers huise en ander eiendom in Suider-Afrika," het die generaal gesê.

"Brittanje het duisende kilometers weg van sy grondgebied teen Argentinië oorlog gemaak om sy belange in die Falkland-eilande te verdedig. Hoekom kan Suid-Afrika dan nie ook die gebied beskerm waarby hy belang het nie?"

**O**R die Suid-Afrikaanse verliese het die Hoof van die Weermag daarop gewys dat wanneer 'n soldaat deur 'n oorlog gaan, verwag hy dat dit kan gebeur. Die gesneuweldes sou nie wou gehad het dat dié wat agterbly, moet tou opgooi en moed verloor nie. Dit sou beteken dat hul dood vergeefs was.

Ter afsluiting het die generaal gesê: "Manne, julle is deur 'n oorlog. Moet julle nou nie gaan verongeluk op die Republiek se paaië nie. Ek wens julle en jul gesinne 'n geseënde Kersfees en 'n voorspoedige Nuwe Jaar toe."

Na dié woorde het die jong manne genl Geldenhuys spontaan toegejuig. 'n Seremoniële oorhandiging van T-hemde het gevolg, waarna die verrigtinge afgesluit is met die sing van "Die Stem".

Genl Geldenhuys het daarna informeel met die soldate gesels en 'n stukkie braai-vleis geniet voordat hy en sy geselskap, wat die Sersant-majoor van die Weermag, AO1 Jan Holliday ingesluit het, weer vertrek het.



**D**IE terugkeer van die gevegsfront na die versamelgebied in Suid-Afrikaanse soldate soos 'n oase in 'n woestyn voorgekom het. Luukshede waaraan die manne by hul tuisenhede nie eens gewoond is nie, is vir hulle in die bosse van Suid-Afrika voorsien.

Die versamelgebied is gebruik as 'n tydelike basis vir die terugkerende soldate voordat hulle na hul tuisenhede in die Republiek vertrek het.

Die meeste soldate het vier dae in die gebied deurgebring waartydens hulle onder meer skoon kleres en nuwe uitrusting ontvang het en vir die eerste keer in 'n lang tyd weer kon was en skeer. In dié tydperk het die manne ook soldy ontvang.

Hul kort verblyf het verder bestaan uit 'n voorligting om 'n geheelindruk van die konflik in Angola te verkry en 'n operasionele nabetraging waar daar 'n terugblik gewerp is op die stryd en positiewe en negatiewe aspekte onder die loop geneem is.

Die soldate het ook 'n mediese ondersoek ondergaan om te verseker dat hulle in goeie gesondheid verkeer. 'n Maatskaplike diens vir diegene met welsynsprobleme en 'n tandheelkundige diens is ook in die Versamelgebied aangebied. Sielkundiges het ook deel van die mediese span uitgemaak. Die geestelike bearbeiding is deur kapelane van die Weermag gedoen.

## Geriewe

Dit was egter die geriewe wat die manne baie hoog op prys gestel het. Soos reeds genoem, het 'n mobiele stort baie gehelp om die Angolese stof af te was. Danksy 'n goed ingerigte veldkombuis kon goed voorbereide en smaaklike kos aan die hongeriges en dorstiges voorsien word.

Vir vryetydsbesteding was daar meer as genoeg tyd en ook hier het die Weermag behoorlik na die manne omgesien.

'n Vermaaklikheidsorkes van die Weermag het elke aand opgetree op 'n verhoog wat in 'n oop stuk veld opgerig is. Kunstenaars soos Klawerjas en Karin Hougaard, asook van die Weermag se eie kunstenaars, het groot aftrek van die manne gekry.

Om die tyd te verwy, kon hulle ook tydskrifte en koerante lees, speletjies soos veerpyltjies, skaak en kaartspel geniet en selfs na 'n groot verskeidenheid video's kyk.

Hoewel alles sover moontlik gedoen is om die soldate se kort verblyf by die versamelgebied so aangenaam moontlik te maak, is dit verstaanbaar dat hulle so kort voor Kersfees so gou moontlik by die huis wou kom. 'n T-hemp wat aandui dat hy aan **Operasie Moduler** deelgeneem het en 'n geskenkpakkie van die Suiderkruisfonds en die Damesvereniging van die SWA Gebiedsmag, sal egter verseker dat elke soldaat 'n herinnering sal hê aan sy betrokkenheid in Angola.



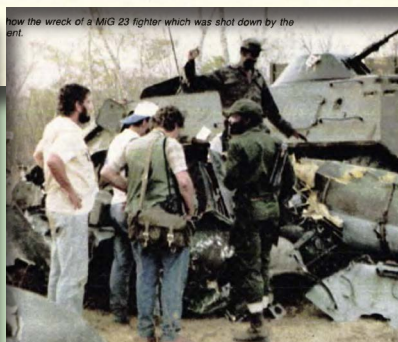
Die SAWI-vragmotor met sy koeldrank en sigarette het groot aftrek by die manne gekry.



Vlugbal was 'n gewilde sportsoort om die tyd te verwy.



Met hul terugkeer na die geveg het sommige soldate die tandarta in sy tent besoek.





















## The Last Stretch



We left the transit camp with Samil 100's (10 Ton trucks) on Saturday, 5 December at 12:00. There were 60 troops per vehicle. The convoys travelled via Grootfontein.

At Tsumeb the 61 Mech Bn Gp Ladies Association awaited the troops with cake and soft drinks. We were all back at Omuthiya by sundown. All the equipment was cleaned and handed back on Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday we all left for Tsumeb to attend the final parade. At the parade, held on the Tsumeb rugby field, Bravo Coy/ATk received all the possible trophies.



*"They are more to me than life, these voices, they are more than motherliness and more than fear; they are the strongest, most comforting thing there is anywhere: they are the voices of my comrades."*

— *Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front*



# Awards for achievers

## NSM honoured for ops duty

DECEMBER the 9th 1987 will not only be remembered by the January 1986 intake as the day that they completed their National Service but also as the day they were honoured by the SADF for the part they played in making Operation Moduler such a resounding success. This was the message delivered by Cmdt Kobus Smith, Officer Commanding of 61 Mechanised Battalion Group, during the Passing Out Parade of hundreds of national servicemen at the Tsumeb High School rugby fields.

Cmdt Smith went on to say that the parade was also a personal highlight in his career as he was to leaving the unit. 1987 was a year of many highlights,

especially when 61 Mechanised Battalion Group made a tactical breakthrough which helped the South African forces to overwhelm the enemy.

Cmdt Smit also said that those present should remember their mates sacrificed their lives during the operation. These young soldiers gave up everything to achieve their goals.

Cmdt Smit presented the following medals and certificates to members of 61 Mechanised Battalion Group:

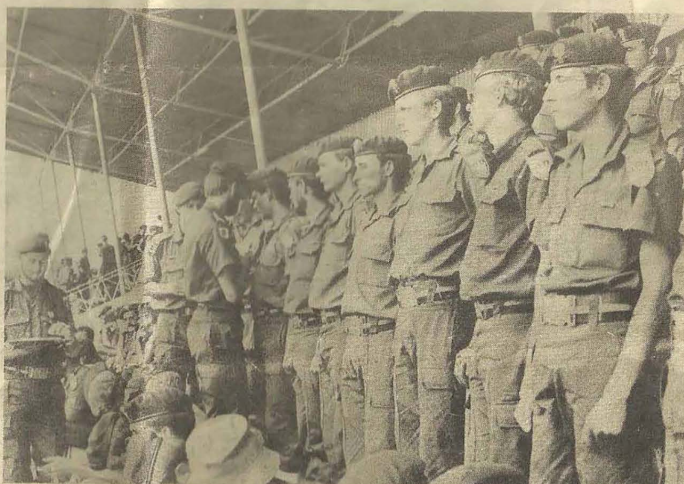
Medal for Loyal Service — silver (20 years) — WO 2 J. H. Lombard  
Chief of the SADF Recommendation — Certificate — Sgt D.F. Kloppers  
Certificate for Loyal Service — bronze (10 years) —

Maj D.H. Lotter  
Officer Commanding Eastern Transvaal Recommendation Certificate — Sgt S.R. Smit.

Officer Commanding Recommendation certificates, Pro Patria medals and Operation Moduler certificates were presented to hundreds of national servicemen completing their two years training.

Cmdt Smit concluded his speech by saying that 1987 was also a year of friendships, where new friends were made and where friends had to work together to achieve the desired goals and objectives.

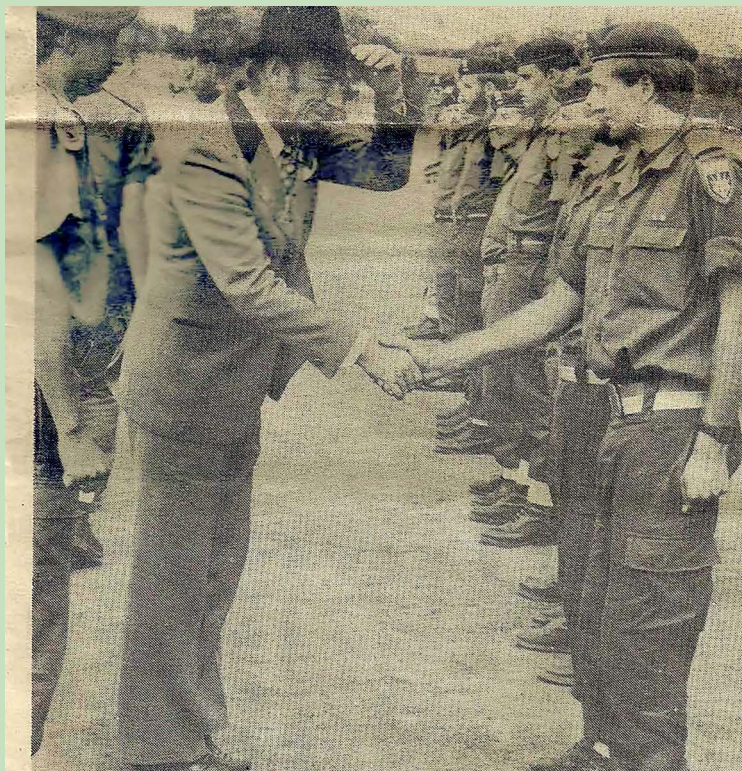
It was also important for friends to protect each other in time of hardships.



DECEMBER the 9th 1987 will not only be remembered by the January 1986 intake as the day that they completed their National Service but also as the day they were honoured by the SADF for the part they played in making Operation Moduler such a resounding success. Each and every national servicemen was presented with a Pro Patria medal by their respective section heads as seen here.







THE mayor of Tsumeb, Mr K.H. Hellwig, seen here congratulating one of the many national servicemen for the part he played in making Operation Moduler such a success.

## Proud soldiers receive awards

THE 1987 prizegiving for members of 61 Mechanised Battalion Group proved to be very successful even though the participants had little time to prepare for the evenings festivities. The prizegiving was put together at short notice as most of the units members were busy with Operation Moduler.

The evenings programme was opened by Mr K.H. Hellwig, Mayor of Tsumeb. In his short address, Mr Hellwig said that the young soldiers should be proud of their actions and also for maintaining the good record of 61 Mechanised Battalion Group.

Communitic onslaught. Mr Hellwig concluded his speech by quoting the final two lines of the SA National Anthem.

The highlight of the evenings proceedings was a demonstration by S Bty on how to manoeuvre a G1 cannon during combat as well as a mass choir

J.J. Smit, Officer Commanding 61 Mechanised Battalion Group.

Bravo Coy were awarded the Wyand trophy for being the most effective sub unit. The remaining prizes were awarded as follows:

Fitness trophy - HO Coy.





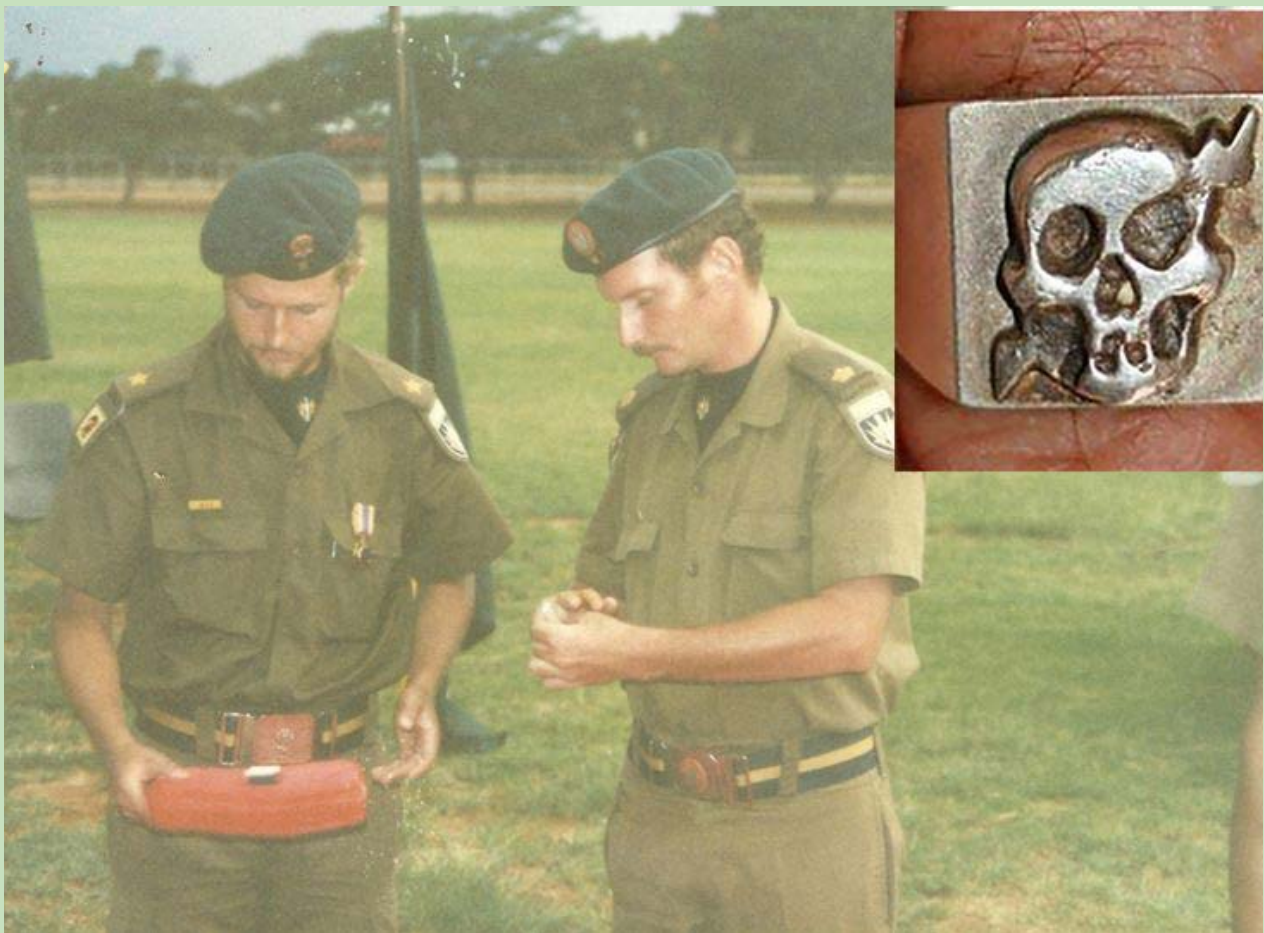
## The Officers Ring



The tradition of the Bravo Coy officers ring had its inception in 1987.

A ring was made for each officer of Bravo Coy. The symbolism pointed to that of an emperor's ring. Accordingly, the emperor pressed his unique seal into hot wax at the bottom of a document. This then made the document official. Similar rings were also worn by the emperor's governors. With planning of the ring the following requirements were set: It must be made of silver to reflect purity, as referred to in Psalm 66:10: "For You have proved us, O God; You have tested us, as silver is refined." It must be worn on the ring finger, left or right. The ring finger is the symbol of creativity and truth according to tradition.

The ring therefore represents purity of heart, creative thinking and truth. Only eight of these rings were made – one for Cmdt Smit and seven others for the seven officers of Bravo Coy. The design and manufacture of the rings were done by the sister of 2Lt van Wyk (Pl 6). It was delivered just in time for handover during the clearing out parade of Bravo Coy 1987.





## The 61 Mech Dagger



Since there was no official handing and taking over symbol when officers commanding of the unit changed, Bravo took the initiative to have one manufactured. Due to the way Cmdt Smit was replaced during Op Modular, it was decided to give it to him as a Bravo token of appreciation. This was done on our final parade.



*John McCrum recalls: “After 5 days in the transit camp we headed back to Omuthiya to hand in our rifles and pack up the rest of our kit. From there we headed to Tsumeb for our uitklaar/medal parade before heading to Grootfontein, where we spent the night, the next morning we flew to Waterkloof where our loved ones and TV crews were waiting to meet us. After climbing off the Samil with my kit it took me a few minutes to locate my parents, I watched them from a short distance away as they tried to find me in the crowd. Even although they stared straight at me a few times they failed to recognize me, it was only after I walked up and spoke to them did, they realize who I was.”*



*Jaco Swanevelder recalls: "Because I was flying to the Transvaal Province I had to say good-bye to good friends that Wednesday, as the Cape Province and Freestate Province guys were flying later. From an emotional viewpoint this was worse than the war. I could not help but cry like a baby. Maybe because I knew that I would probably never see these men, who went through hell with me, again. Or maybe the reality sank in – that we survived a war, having been in the front lines. We landed at Waterkloof Air Force Base and all I could say was that the reception was "underwhelming"! It quickly became apparent that our families and the general public were totally in the dark regarding the actual situation in South West Africa and Angola..... and then we drank!"*





# AND SO, A YEAR OF CONTRASTS CAME TO PAST 1987



**“This is not the end, this is not even the beginning  
of the end, this is just perhaps the end of the be-  
ginning.”**

***W S CHURCHILL***





## EPILOGUE

As this Bravo Journal starts with a poem from Hugo Gerrits as the Prologue, so it ends in my own poem (Translated by Genl Tony Savides in English) as Epilogue.

From Bloemfontein I summoned you  
As guardian counting you one by one  
Accepting the brief with approval won  
Together to see mortal danger through

I collected you at Grootfontein  
To school and hone you as I choose  
Fear you did not yet entertain  
While your innocence you soon would lose

At Omuthiya your being was pawned  
To a greater aim as just patriotism formed  
Like David and Jonathan forging a bond  
A band of brothers taking a first step beyond

On the Blue Range we sharpened each other  
A battle axe in a vice to be honed  
Only then each trusting as would a brother  
To strengthen each hand in a team well-toned

At Ombalantu measured as on a scale  
Seeing potential and ready to stand  
Each like a finger of the same hand  
Standing together to fight tooth and nail

At the Lomba – in the crucible's white hot flame  
This team ensured a harvest of note and fame  
Building the battles block by block  
Each supporting the other - solid as a rock



At the Mianei again as brothers side by side  
Courageous - avoiding death, brushing fear aside  
Gradually realising then that end may be in sight  
We had actually beaten all; our inferior numbers despite

At Vimpulo – our bond now at its peak  
In this harsh land our steel tempered never weak  
Despite every now and then tested by fear anew  
Always there for one another as our bond yet stronger grew

At Mavinga, tired, no words spoken and yet  
Looking to the north with a new comprehension  
The Flossie packed with the members of our set  
Thoughts erupting at the seams, breaking the tension

To Grootfontein I sent you all again  
The bond fading slightly as I was to remain  
As I look at my fingers as at each hand I peer  
None broken or bruised – indeed still all there

You have gone, subtly taking part of me  
I remain behind with the if and the maybe  
And the emptiness now and of power devoid  
Where I yearn for the togetherness we enjoyed  
Because a portion of my soul I've yielded  
And to each of you it's ceded.